Leading the Way: The First Year of the *State Leaders Innovation Institute*

Prepared by the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce for the National Technical Assistance and Research Center to Promote Leadership for Increasing Employment and Economic Independence of Adults with Disabilities

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Executive Summary

State and local policymakers are beginning to realize that for a region to thrive economically, an inclusive workforce that values the contributions of all citizens, including people with disabilities, is a necessity. This realization has resulted in an increased commitment to expand employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. In turn, this has contributed to efforts in some states to pursue "systems change" across workforce development and disability employment programs. These systems change efforts are characterized by the bringing together of actors from across a disparate range of generic, mainstream employment, and disability-specific agencies, programs, and services to look for areas where collaboration and partnership seem likely to produce better outcomes than each entity working in its own silo. Advocates of systems change believe the efforts will reduce some of the hurdles that have prevented adults with disabilities from successfully participating in the workforce.

In April 2007, the National Technical Assistance and Research Leadership Center to Promote Employment and Economic Independence for Adults with Disabilities (the NTAR Leadership Center) selected cross-agency state teams from Connecticut, Maryland, and Minnesota to participate in a pilot project called the State Leaders Innovation Institute (SLII). The goal of the SLII is to promote systems change that will improve employment outcomes for adults with disabilities by encouraging closer connections between disability employment agencies and actors and the workforce and economic development systems in each state.

The SLII is based on the premise that although there have been examples of innovative and successful models to help achieve employment for adults with disabilities, the techniques and lessons from these models may lead to greater results if they are integrated and made relevant to both the generic workforce development system and the state's economic development priorities. Many states, including the three SLII pilot states, have made progress in reorienting their workforce development systems to be more "demand-driven," or focused on meeting the needs of employers and regional economies as well as individual job seekers. The NTAR Leadership Center asked the SLII states to encourage similar connections between their disability employment efforts and their demand-focused workforce efforts to ensure that people with disabilities are included in sector strategies and treated as part of the regional talent pipeline. In order to facilitate the path toward systems change, the NTAR Leadership Center asked the governors of each state to designate appropriate leadership and membership for state teams, including representatives from their own office and from state workforce development, economic development, disability employment agencies, and others.

Disability and workforce development systems change initiatives include efforts to improve the functioning and coordination of a myriad of institutions, policies, laws, behaviors, and programs to better serve both job seekers and employers. One challenge to these efforts is that many of these programs and policies are not connected in any formal sense as a "system" and do not come together naturally in the absence of concerted efforts. While progress toward systems change can be incentivized by policy or funding changes or encouraged by a particular pilot project and other opportunities, it always begins with and relies on dedicated leaders and champions. As a recent Annie E. Casey Foundation report on the subject explained, "Bureaucratic systems tend to resist change. It requires the leadership of champions and other change agents to foster innovation in systems, to take new innovations to scale, and to sustain the changes over time."[1]

Systems change is difficult and time-consuming work that requires leaders, managers, frontline staff, employers, and individual consumers of services to change how they operate. Because the results of systems change can be difficult to quantify, this report seeks to capture aspects of the process each state team underwent in the first phase of their work. The SLII project began in mid-2008, following a kick-off meeting held at Rutgers University in July and will officially conclude in late 2010. This report was researched by an outside team from the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce in early 2009. It chronicles some of what the three state teams were doing in their first year of the project. It also includes reflections by team leaders and members on the process.

Based on their experiences during the first year, Connecticut, Maryland, and Minnesota team leaders have said they believe participating in the SLII has permanently changed the dialogue in their states, ensuring that issues relating to the employment of people with disabilities will increasingly be part of all future workforce development conversations. This is a considerable accomplishment, especially given the depressed economy and high unemployment rates since the recession that began in December 2007, as well as the low labor force participation rates of the past several years, particularly for people with disabilities.

As a direct result of participation in the SLII, the Connecticut team has:

- Worked more closely with Connect-Ability, the state's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG), and a broad team composed of workforce development, community colleges, corrections, vocational rehabilitation, economic development, the employer community, and other partners to jointly address more thoroughly issues surrounding employer engagement;

- Conducted a widespread inventory of all One-Stop Career Centers and community colleges to determine the availability of Assistive Technology and developed a plan to address the gaps and improve the capacity of One-Stop Career Centers to use this technology; and

- Made a commitment to exploring and developing State as Model Employer policy changes.

As a direct result of their participation in the SLII, the Maryland team has:

- Contributed to the adoption of a resolution at the Governor's Workforce Investment Board on the implementation of Universal Design principles in the state's One-Stop Career Centers;

- Developed a plan identifying specific workforce development, housing, and transportation action steps to encourage the inclusion of people with disabilities as part of Maryland's talent pipeline for jobs connected to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) expansions in Maryland;

- Conducted a focus group with employers considered likely to relocate to Maryland as part of the BRAC expansions to identify recruitment strategies and skill needs, resulting in the development of several job seeker fact sheets around security clearances, asset development, and financial literacy;

- Executed interagency memoranda of understanding between the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation, and the Maryland Department of Disabilities to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities as part of the state's BRAC plans;

- In partnership with Harford Community College, developed a webinar series on essential workplace skills for job seekers; and

- Begun work on the development of WorkStats, a cross-agency data system.

As a direct result of their participation in the SLII, the Minnesota team has:

- Crafted a vision of a fully integrated and collaborative workforce development system that encompasses the state's network of one-stop WorkForce Centers, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, K-12 education, Department of Human Services, Department of Education, and the business community;

- Begun testing this vision with a regional pilot project, with preliminary results indicating that active collaboration by all participants in the career development continuum produces time and process efficiencies, and that including employers as partners can increase their understanding of the skills of people with disabilities and improve the probability of employment for program participants; and

- Made a significant commitment through the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development's Workforce Development Division to: embed Universal Design principles in both the physical space and program planning for the one-stop WorkForce Centers; educate and train other WorkForce Center partners in Universal Design principles; and review the Division's operational policies to ensure they are supportive of Universal Design.

In addition to the specific achievements in each state, several cross-cutting themes have emerged. They are:

- **The presence or development of a unifying philosophy and strategic goal enables systems change teams to be focused and stay "on message."** For example, Maryland's governor has proclaimed a commitment to there being "No Spare Marylander," a mantra team members refer to often.

- **Deep involvement of leadership enables teams to make decisions and deliver.** In all three states, the governor's signature on the initial letter of application to the NTAR Leadership Center served as the stamp of approval that galvanized action by state agencies. In spite of competing priorities, the sustained leadership and dedication of the team leaders has helped the teams succeed in their efforts for systems change.

- **Relationship and trust building are keys to interagency collaboration.** In all three states, some of the team members knew each other and had worked together on previous projects. However, in each case, the SLII provided an important cross-agency venue for new conversations and new partnerships toward a common goal expressed by the respective governors' offices.

- **Progress toward disability employment efforts is cumulative and experiential.** All three state teams had the opportunity to learn about and consider adopting service delivery approaches that blend the best knowledge states have gleaned from disability employment (including but not limited to supported employment and Customized Employment) and from the workforce fields (e.g., sector strategies, career pathways, credentialing, internships, and apprenticeships) and are applying those lessons to their efforts concerning systems change.

- **Building on existing success leads to systems change more rapidly than creating an entirely new initiative.** In Connecticut, for example, the team chose to coordinate closely with Connect-Ability rather than start a totally new effort. Likewise, Minnesota is building on existing pilot initiatives, striving to make the models more universally available to people with disabilities and other job seekers. Minnesota is also taking advantage of the resources of its Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG), Pathways to Employment. MIGs have provided substantial funding to many states to support the competitive employment of people with disabilities. The three SLII states have each forged ties to their MIGs, encouraging the participation of MIG leaders as key SLII team members and promoting MIG-funded activities. They have also successfully leveraged MIG resources.

The three SLII states have also reported some common challenges to their work, including:

- **State and federal funding silos are a common challenge** across the states, and blending and braiding funds at the federal level can sometimes face resistance from advocacy groups who fear their programs will be subsumed or lost if they do not remain separate from other funding streams. Demonstrations in blending and braiding of funds are essential in the short term; educating policymakers and key state leaders to change the silos is essential in the long term.

- **Attitudes toward people with disabilities and work continue to be a challenge,** including the attitudes of the disability community, employers, service delivery staff, and people with disabilities themselves. Many stakeholders are only slowly starting to believe that work, especially work in competitive employment, is a viable and reasonable option for people with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities. The SLII states are encouraging opportunities for internships, on-the-job training, and other types of work experience, which benefits both the job seeker with a disability and the attitudes of employers and service providers.

- **Engaging employers is an ongoing challenge** for the workforce development system at large and is magnified for the disability community. The SLII states are experimenting with a variety of approaches to overcome this obstacle. Nationally, and in states such as Minnesota, Maryland, and Connecticut, sector-based approaches are proving to be an effective strategy.

- **The complexity of benefits, services, and funding streams that are available to support people with disabilities to employment is confusing** to workforce professionals, as well as to people with disabilities. In particular, there is a widespread lack of understanding of how Medicaid funding fits into the employment equation and about the potential impact of various asset development strategies to make work pay and to increase economic advancement for people with disabilities.

- **The Workforce Investment Act-funded One-Stop Career Centers are still not uniformly viewed as an effective avenue for people with disabilities** to access employment and training. Considerably more work needs to be done in the area of Universal Design and staff professional development before One-Stops can truly be a "one-stop" for **all** job seekers.

Introduction

In May 2007, the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) of the U.S. Department of Labor issued a solicitation to create a national center. The center's purpose would be to conduct research, develop and disseminate information, and provide technical assistance to states in an effort to improve the employment and economic participation of adults with disabilities into the American labor market. At that time, federal officials recognized that despite multiple federal disability employment initiatives and a growing body of promising practices from ODEP-sponsored research, findings from these efforts were not widely distributed nor being used by state and local policymakers and practitioners, thus too often making their impact on policy and practice within states not evident.[2]

To help better disseminate research findings, encourage the use of new interventions and multi-agency strategies, and document effective and promising state policies and strategies, federal officials established the National Technical Assistance and Research Leadership Center to Promote Employment and Economic Independence for Adults with Disabilities (NTAR Leadership Center). The operation of the NTAR Leadership Center was awarded, through a competitive solicitation, to the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and a collaboration of national partners.[3]

Based on parameters established by the ODEP solicitation, the newly established NTAR Leadership Center sought to accomplish its goals by advocating for a "demand-driven" approach to helping improve employment opportunities for adults with disabilities. Demand-driven workforce development refers to strategies to increase the effectiveness of workforce and talent development systems by connecting workforce policies to economic development goals, making these systems more responsive to employers. In simple terms, a demand-driven workforce development system builds in processes for identifying and responding to employer needs. This requires engaging employers as partners in planning and implementing workforce and economic development strategies and allows for ongoing communication and feedback. Demand-driven systems reflect a region's industry and occupational needs and may take the form of sector-based strategies. The NTAR Leadership Center set out to achieve its goals by providing information and technical assistance to state officials who were interested in pioneering innovative and creative demand-driven models, as well as those interested in developing more sustainable partnerships between existing disability employment efforts and state workforce development and economic growth strategies.

The framework for the NTAR Leadership Center's research and technical assistance agenda was established by ODEP in five published strategic goals. Research conducted under the leadership of ODEP since its inception in 2001 suggested important insights into areas ODEP believed could effectively improve a state's capacity to better serve adults with disabilities and increase their employment rate and economic status. Accordingly, the NTAR Leadership Center's activities were set within the findings of this research and formed the basis for the Center's strategic goal areas:

- Effective **leadership, collaboration, and partnerships** are the foundation for systems change efforts and at the base of every best practice.

- **Cross-agency and cross-system collaboration** result in opportunities for leveraging expertise and resources — especially important to serving job seekers with complex barriers to employment, both those with and without disabilities. This blending and braiding of resources enables service providers to respond to the unique strengths and needs of individual job seekers.

- To the extent possible, the **principle of Universal Design** should apply not just to removing physical barriers but also to practices, services, and programs of the workforce development system and other environments, including the workplace and technology used there, resulting in improved efficiency and better customer service.

- Tax incentives, financial literacy efforts, benefits planning, and other **asset-building efforts** and incentives encouraging work can increase the prospects of employment success for people with disabilities and improve their longer-term economic outcomes.

- **Customized Employment strategies and flexibility in the workplace** can enhance employment opportunities and job success for people with and without disabilities. Businesses have traditionally used company policies and programs to accommodate the needs of all employees, including flextime, telecommuting, job sharing, family leave, childcare, and health care coverage. Using Customized Employment strategies to individualize the employment relationship between the job seeker and the employer can meet the needs of both and can greatly improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities.[4]

In addition to offering technical assistance and disseminating research to state decision-makers in these five goal areas, ODEP required that the NTAR Leadership Center establish a pilot with up to three states interested in pursuing policy changes and new practices that would eventually lead to a more comprehensive, better integrated, and a more coordinated "to work" system for people with disabilities. The pilot, as envisioned, would work to improve economic and work opportunities for adults with disabilities by developing stronger leadership within the state and by nurturing more sustainable partnerships between existing workforce development, economic development, and disability systems. Believing that a large base of resources and research already existed nationally, it was anticipated that the NTAR Leadership Center would offer a state that participated in the pilot intensive leadership training and coaching, access to national policy experts and researchers, and customized on-site technical assistance. In turn, states would be encouraged to develop new or alternate innovative strategies tied to the five ODEP goal areas, put in place new policies to support these new strategies, and work to better bridge and blend workforce and economic development systems, resources, and relationships with existing state disability and employment efforts. The expectation was that by working intensively with a select group of cross-system state leaders and educating them about promising practices from past ODEP research in the five goal areas, states would take steps to adopt identified promising practices and policies that might not have occurred in the absence of the pilot.[5]

To design the pilot, NTAR Leadership Center staff engaged in early discussions with a wide range of nationally respected organizations in the workforce development and disability arenas, including the National Governors Association, the Center for Law and Social Policy, the American Public Human Services Association, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, national disability employer researchers, and other state disability and workforce development officials

to discuss design options for the pilots. The result was the establishment of a pilot institute for up to 3 states that would be recruited through a national competitive solicitation to governors in all 50 states and to the District of Columbia. The solicitation would outline elements of the type of systems change envisioned to successfully transition people with disabilities into their communities and the world of work. In January 2008, the NTAR Leadership Center issued a letter to the nation's governors seeking states interested in enhancing employment prospects for adults with disabilities through participation in its pilot activities entitled the State Leaders Innovation Institute (SLII).[6]

The solicitation required that the effort be led by the governor's office or state workforce officials. The NTAR Leadership Center believed this approach would best meet the objective of systems change as envisioned by the federal government and the Center. Participation in the SLII required states to assemble high-level teams comprised of representatives from economic development, workforce development, and disability employment sectors, and the employer community. The primary conditions for being selected were a commitment to integrating disability employment policy into the state's economic growth plans, and a history of demonstrated leadership in both demand-driven workforce development as well as in promoting workforce participation for people with disabilities.

The NTAR Leadership Center staff were encouraged that 39 states participated in a bidders' conference call for application to the 15-month institute. In addition to applications from the three selected pilot states, 10 high-quality applications were received that could not be accommodated in the scope of SLII. As such, a peer learning group was formed and actively continues under the aegis of the State Peer Leaders Network (SPLN).[7] Disability experts in several of the states that were not selected commented that the proposal process was the first time they were able to get the attention of the governor's office and the workforce development system focused on the need to include people with disabilities in the state's talent development strategies. The founding of the SPLN was in part a response to these states not wanting to lose the momentum they felt had been started in the solicitation process, and a number of states have continued to work with cross-agency teams, including Virginia, the District of Columbia, Ohio, and Rhode Island.

NTAR Leadership Center staff found it challenging to choose the finalists from among so many eager state applicants. The solicitation emphasized the selection preference would be for states that had: put together high-level, cross-agency teams among and across the generic and disability-specific systems; exhibited a great deal of "change readiness" and enthusiasm for participating in the SLII; and a track record of wanting to innovate and experiment, as evidenced by having received systems change grants in both the disability area as well as the workforce area from various federal agencies or foundations (e.g., Workforce Innovations for Regional Economic Development, Disability Program Navigators, Medicaid Infrastructure Grants, ODEP customized employment grants, and others). Fundamentally, the intent of the SLII was to take states to an even higher level and to see what progress their leaders could make within ODEP's strategic goals. Ultimately, the NTAR Leadership Center selected three states with very different driving forces:

- **Connecticut** proposed to connect multiple but disparate state initiatives using "Universal Design" (interpreted as common intake, consistency of terminology, and approach among agencies) as a driving framework. Connecticut's application was submitted on behalf of the state by The WorkPlace, Inc., the local Workforce Investment Board entity for southwestern Connecticut based in Bridgeport. The WorkPlace, Inc., and the governor's Southwest Office

would co-chair the team. The NTAR Leadership Center was interested to see if a model where significant leadership is provided by a local entity is different than models where leadership comes entirely from the state level.

- **Maryland** found opportunity for systems change in a desire to connect people with disabilities to the opportunities likely to result from the Base Realignment and Closure initiative that promised to bring tens of thousands of jobs into the state. Maryland assembled a strong team co-chaired by two members of the governor's Cabinet, the Secretary of the Department of Disabilities, and the Secretary of the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation.

- **Minnesota** proposed systems change in the context of inclusive regional prosperity, linking strategies for improving the employment of individuals with disabilities to regional, sector-based approaches for economic and workforce development. The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development assumed the lead.

Under the SLII, the three selected states were provided:

- An in-state orientation by NTAR Leadership Center faculty;

- Two, two-and-a-half-day team-building and strategy development sessions;

- Access to a peer learning and information sharing network;

- Customized technical assistance and training (both on site and via telephone), including access to national experts and scholars in the five strategic goal areas; and

- A discretionary grant up to $50,000 for project implementation.

The NTAR Leadership Center assigned each state two "concierges" who provided the orientation, arranged for technical assistance, and acted as a continuing point of contact and a case manager with the NTAR Leadership Center. In-state orientations served primarily to acquaint the teams with their concierges and the goals of the SLII. The true launch for the institute was the first two-and-a-half-day team-building and strategy development conference in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in July 2008. NTAR Leadership Center staff characterized it afterwards as a "consciousness-changing event" for everyone involved, as participants were exposed to a wide variety of experts and scholars knowledgeable about workforce and disability policy as well as promising practices surrounding employment for persons with disabilities. The event allowed the team members concentrated time away from their offices to focus on developing strategies, building relationships, and learning from each other's state activities. In addition to time spent in plenary sessions, each state was assigned its own team meeting room and was charged with beginning to develop a state action plan.

After the July 2008 session, the teams and/or team subcommittees met intermittently on their own schedules with regular check-ins and occasional site visits from the NTAR Leadership Center team. A second SLII team-building meeting, held in April 2009, continued the relationship building, peer

networking, state team time, and learning environment available in the first session. Observations of state team meetings in April 2009 revealed moderate degrees of progress within each state while offering team members an ideal opportunity to take advantage of concentrated planning time that would look to better focus as well as speed their efforts.

The profiles of these state efforts to date, described in this report, reveal the lengths to which states with strong leaders across multiple agencies, a history of innovation, and a commitment to improving policy and practice must go to make modest and incremental progress toward improving state and local service delivery systems to improve the employment of people with disabilities. As demonstrated in the state profiles, each state has made progress in its first year despite the emergence of the economic recession, the demands of serving large numbers of newly laid-off and dislocated workers in their state workforce and education systems, a high national and state unemployment rate, and unexpected state planning for the use of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds (including rapidly preparing for summer youth programs in the summer of 2009). Fundamentally, these three states are working to establish a stronger coalition to transform their workforce development systems and disability employment efforts. They are working to build more unified systems by establishing a vision of where they want to go. They are building relationships and trying to establish trust with new partners. They are trying to keep a steady pace and remain focused on their vision in a rapidly fluctuating state and national economic environment.

The Connecticut Story: Aligning and Connecting Disparate Initiatives to Increase Economic Opportunities for People with Disabilities

Connecticut began major workforce development and disability employment reforms many years prior to participating in the State Leaders Innovation Institute (SLII). The state had already been enormously successful in seeding innovation and systems change through its achievements in securing grants to pilot several regional and statewide initiatives. Acknowledging low population growth and potentially large numbers of retiring Baby Boomers in the next 10 years, the state began in haste to develop strategies that would better tap non-traditional populations to fulfill its future workforce needs. When it applied to the SLII, Connecticut was feeling the effects of workforce skills shortages, especially in industries critical to the state's economic competitiveness such as bio-technology, advanced manufacturing, health care, information technology, financial services, hospitality, and retail. Developing a pipeline of skilled workers for these industries in a strategic and targeted way was front and center in the minds of the governor and state policymakers.

A significant concern of Connecticut officials was the importance of regional economic development. State officials were interested in leveraging workforce development and economic development activities that were taking place regionally, and especially in southwestern Connecticut. There, The WorkPlace, Inc., the local Workforce Investment Board located in Bridgeport, had been successful in making inroads to better integrate its workforce and economic activities through a U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grant that looked at regional prosperity issues and included strategies for people with disabilities. The WorkPlace, Inc. also secured a U.S. Department of Labor-funded High Growth Job Training Initiative grant, which established the Insurance and Financial Services Center for Educational Excellence to address the supply and demand challenges faced by Connecticut's insurance and financial services firms. In both of these initiatives, southwestern Connecticut and The WorkPlace, Inc. tested innovative strategies while looking for ways to increase the pipeline of workers with disabilities into the state's efforts. With the support of Governor Rell's office, moving the state further ahead in the disability employment arena through The WorkPlace, Inc. was a natural progression. According to Governor Jodi Rell, in the state's application to the SLII:

> The WorkPlace has been instrumental in establishing numerous initiatives to serve job-seekers with disabilities. It has successfully established collaborative relationships with the agencies and employers that will be represented on our leadership team. The WorkPlace has the capacity to organize and lead this endeavor. (Governor Jodi Rell, March 27, 2008)[8]

Ready for Pioneering Change

For Connecticut, the primary reason for participating in the SLII was its need to specifically address what was felt to be a looming workforce skill shortage. Because of little to no population growth and potential mass retirements by Baby Boomers, Connecticut was becoming increasingly concerned about its competitiveness. State leadership felt it strategically necessary to begin serious efforts to build a workforce pipeline for key industries. An important part of the strategy included

tapping the state's unemployed and underemployed workforce, including, but not limited to, people with disabilities.

By the time of its application to the SLII, Connecticut had an impressive record of implementing many state and local initiatives that included more fully engaging people with disabilities in the economic mainstream; however, sustainable systemic change had been elusive. For Connecticut leaders, participation in the SLII provided a focal point for convening state and local change agents and better aligning state and local resources and goals. Universal Design (interpreted as common intake, consistency of terminology, and approach among agencies) and employer engagement were believed by the state's leadership to have the greatest potential as the primary drivers of connected and coordinated change across multi-agency workforce development, economic development, and disability employment systems.

Numerous foundational initiatives in Connecticut set the stage for the NTAR Leadership Center work, most notably:

- **WIRED "Talent for Growth".** The WorkPlace, Inc., a recipient of a U.S. Department of Labor Generation 2 WIRED grant, issued a request for proposals soliciting training programs for innovative and sustainable projects to prepare a competitive workforce. The request required bidders target one of four populations, including adults/youth with disabilities.

- **Medicaid Infrastructure Grant.** The 2007 grant, now known in Connecticut as Connect-Ability, is aimed at tapping the full employment potential of people with disabilities. All the major state agencies are partners in Connect-Ability, which provides a single link with information for the agencies, employers, youth, and parents. The NTAR Leadership Center state team felt they were able to give heightened visibility and credibility to Connect-Ability because of their direct support from the governor.

- **Disability Program Navigators (DPN).** Trained navigators serve as resources for the state's CTWorks, Connecticut's One-Stop Career Center system. DPNs are responsible for establishing new relationships and strengthening partnerships to ensure more integrated and comprehensive workforce services for people with disabilities. In the north central region managed by Capital Workforce Partners, the DPN has been sustained through its WIA One-Stop operations and in eastern Connecticut, the DPN is connected directly to the Ticket to Work initiative.

- **Telework/Telecommuting Pilot Research.** The WorkPlace, Inc. received one of three awards in the nation to conduct national surveys to determine the efficacy of telework for disabled veterans and other people with disabilities. The grantees worked as a team with the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy to investigate the realities and possibilities of telework as an employment option.

- **Employment Network: Ticket to Work.** The Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program is an employment program for people with disabilities who want to work. Career Resources, Inc., the CTWorks One-Stop operator in The WorkPlace's region, is one of 30 Employment Networks in the state recognized to provide services under the program.

- **Western Connecticut's Project with Industries (PWI).** The WorkPlace, Inc. partnered with PWI, a neighboring regional workforce board, and the state's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and Board of Education Services for the Blind to win an award that funded the creation of a multi-tiered job placement program. The role of this PWI team was to provide job development services, screenings, and coordination of One-Stop services for people with disabilities on how to access needed training to provide skilled workers for business clients.

- **National Governors Association Policy Academy on Improving Outcomes for Young Adults with Disabilities.** Connecticut was one of six states selected for a NGA academy that focused on youth with disabilities. Through their participation in this academy, the Connecticut team designed and implemented solutions and policies to establish a comprehensive and coordinated system of care for young adults with disabilities who are transitioning from home and school to independence and work. A resource map was developed in January 2008 in connection with the academy.

- **EveryOne Works, 2002 and 2004.** Resources from the 2002 EveryOne Works grant were used to enhance the capacity of the One-Stop Centers to provide accessible, seamless service delivery and outreach to Social Security Insurance and Social Security Disability Insurance beneficiaries and other people with disabilities, develop an inventory of services and resources, and establish procedures for identifying persons with hidden disabilities. The 2004 grant funded DPN outreach to high schools, promoted disability screening for persons transitioning from welfare to work, and provided information to employers on behalf of job seekers with disabilities.

- **EveryOne Rides.** Funded through a grant from the Community Transportation Association of America, EveryOne Rides is focused on developing employment-related transportation resources for people with disabilities. It builds upon the efforts of EveryOne Works.

- **Mental Health Systems Transformation Grant.** In October 2005, Connecticut was awarded a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services to transform the state's mental health care system. Stakeholders include 13 state departments, the state's judicial branch, consumers and family members, and public and private providers.

Through these diverse initiatives, Connecticut SLII team representatives identified some common ongoing challenges they felt their participation in the SLII could help them better address. They were:

- Employers' general lack of knowledge about people with disabilities,

- Employers' reluctance to engage in a project that promotes the hiring of people with disabilities,

- Difficulty in understanding the population because of the wide range of impairments covered by the term "disabilities," and

- The lack of a blanket approach that is effective with all people with disabilities.

The Unique Connecticut Environment for Innovation and Leadership

Similar to the other two states in the SLII, Connecticut demonstrated great success at receiving grants and experimenting with innovations and systems change. What made Connecticut's application unique, however, was the involvement of, and leadership provided by a local Workforce Investment Board fully supported by the governor. Given Connecticut's traditional emphasis on local authority, however, this structure was not totally surprising. The team representative from the Governor's Office explained that Governor Rell has complete trust in the local boards and perceives them as full partners in helping Connecticut be economically competitive. Local entities take initiative in so many ways in the state that the line between state and local entities is often blurred, creating an unusual policy environment. Connecticut often relies on the WorkPlace Inc. as a conveyer and coordinator of large projects. From the state's perspective, it was natural for The WorkPlace, Inc. to take the lead for the project. In addition to the strong support for local initiatives, the Connecticut team also believed it had existing structural and private assets that would further support and enhance its desire to continue the state's innovation and leadership in the workforce development, disability employment, and economic development arena. Team members cited these other assets as noteworthy:

- A **data integration** project to begin integrating data warehoused in multiple departments by a variety of information systems. The project involves data sharing between the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), BRS, and Medicaid. The goal is to be able to track the number of people being served by different departments with different resources without duplication. It is being implemented by DDS and DMHAS and is funded by Connect-Ability and the Transformation Grant at DMHAS.

- The Connecticut Department of Labor's identification of **disability-friendly companies** on its Web site.

- The revitalization of the **Connecticut Business Leadership Network** (BLN) through $200,000 in MIG funding and a new director with experience working with the employer community.

- The restructuring of **The WorkPlace, Inc.** itself to bring several disability-related projects together under the direction of one staff person as a way of increasing interconnections and leveraging resources among the projects. The projects include:

  • The Projects with Industry grant funded by the Department of Education is locally oriented, but The WorkPlace, Inc. coordinates with a neighboring Workforce Investment Board to involve all of western Connecticut in an effort to increase employer awareness and generate employment opportunities;

- A WIRED-funded research project that will produce in-depth demographic information about people with disabilities, which can be shared with Connect-Ability. Community colleges have been engaged to perform the research and analysis; and

- A Connect-Ability-funded pilot project aimed at helping increase the transition rate of high school students with disabilities to postsecondary education or employment. The project will address transportation and other barriers to employment and promote the benefits of hiring and retaining people with disabilities to the business community.

Private Assets that Support Connecticut's Innovation and Leadership

- People with disabilities are being hired at all levels at the **Walgreens Distribution Center** initiative in Windsor, thanks to a company commitment to hire individuals with disabilities. The demand drove state agencies, including the departments of Rehabilitation Services, Labor, and Economic Development and the regional workforce board, Capital Workforce Partners, to cooperate closely to satisfy this large employer's needs.

- The **Connecticut Retail Association** is providing soft skills training to multiple under-represented populations, including people with disabilities.

Connecticut's Vision and Goals Under the State Leaders Innovation Institute Effort

The Vision: Collaboration + Awareness + Capacity + Inclusive Policy = Jobs

From the start, Connecticut felt it was important, based on the lessons it had learned in implementing other systems change efforts, to:

- Ensure collaboration among multiple state and local agencies so as to better leverage their services;

- Expand awareness about the talent, skills, and availability for employment of people with disabilities;

- Continue to build on its existing employment infrastructure and its prior achievements in the arena of disability employment; and

- Incorporate inclusive policies and practices in its workforce and disability employment systems.

The state looked at its participation in the SLII as the vehicle it needed to tie its disparate projects together. This included tying employment opportunities for adults with disabilities to the state's broader economic development, economic growth, and sector strategies. As such, the state team established three major goals at the beginning of the state's SLII participation. They are:

Goal 1: Employer Outreach and Engagement

- Build on the structure of the Connect-Ability framework;

- Meet employers on their own terms;

- Understand business needs and hiring processes;

- Develop a trusting relationship with employers;

- Establish a quality control mechanism for referrals; and

- Promote disability as diversity.

Goal 2: Develop a Functional Talent Development System (supply chain)

- Establish single points of contact for employers (entry into the process);

- Collaborate/build on Walgreens' experience;

- Promote inter-agency communication; and

- Ensure good referrals through quality control.

Goal 3: Coordinate Statewide Initiatives

- Identify players to survey regarding current and planned state initiatives and build on any initiatives already in place;

- Establish a review team to identify redundancies, overlaps, and compatibility;

- Build a clearinghouse of disability-related data, activities, resources, and services; and

- Sustain and support a single point of entry for employers.

> The state looked at its participation in the SLII as the vehicle it needed to tie its disparate projects together. This included tying employment opportunities for adults with disabilities to the state's broader economic development, economic growth, and sector strategies, which are industry-specific, regional approaches to employers' needs for skilled workers and workers' needs for good jobs.

By 2009, the entire state of Connecticut and specifically southwestern Connecticut were markedly affected by the economic recession and turmoil in the nation's financial sector. Conscious that its attention was being diverted from the original SLII goals, the Connecticut team determined that it needed to make certain mid-course changes that would serve to refocus and better align its efforts, while being responsive to the immediate problems of the state's recently unemployed. These included:

- Clarifying responsibilities among partners for the priority goals;

- Identifying additional strategic partners;

- Increasing service access in the One-Stop Career Centers through the universal integration of Assistive Technology;

- Sustaining a disability specialist/point of contact within each career center (the DPN initiative was seed-funded through the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration);

- Developing asset building as an area of focus; and

- Focusing on ways to blend funding and other resources in order to achieve the goals.

Over the course of the year in the SLII, the team refined its goals and defined short- and long-term deliverables to measure success, which are shown in Table 1 on page 18.

Connecticut's aspirations will not all be attained during the period of SLII participation, but team members' commitment to the goals and deliverables is promising for achieving the system transformation they seek, which will ultimately be evidenced by:

- Coordination of employer outreach among all state agencies;

- Cross-agency data collection; and

- Sustained attention, oversight, and resources for disability initiatives.

Table 1. Connecticut's Short- and Long-Term Goals and Deliverables

Six-Month Deliverables	Next Year Deliverables
Goal 1: Systems Change Including the integration of disability-related services with Connect-Ability and a review and enhancement of Assistive Technology as a piece of broader Universal Design strategy	
■ Integrate disability-related services with Connect-Ability ■ Review and enhance levels of Assistive Technology	■ Report on accomplishments
Goal 2: Partnerships Including strengthening the roles of the Disability Program Navigators	
■ Review goals and responsibilities of Disability Program Navigator to maximize effectiveness ■ Introduce new partners and strengthen all partnerships ■ Collect, review, and finalize toolkit	■ Train partners on toolkit and promote it among them all
Goal 3: Employer Engagement Including working closely with the Connecticut Business Leadership Network and developing an employer toolkit	
■ Make toolkit available to employers ■ Use Business Leadership Network to assist in employer engagement	■ Conduct outreach to small employers ■ Strive to make the state a model employer of people with disabilities

The Team: Connecticut's State Leadership Structure and Framework

Connecticut originally assembled a large and comprehensive team that, from its perspective, reflected the "who's who" of change agents in the state. Team members included representatives from:

■ The governor's Southwestern Office;

■ The WorkPlace, Inc.;

- The state departments of Administrative Services, Economic and Community Development, Labor, Developmental Services, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Corrections, and Social Services, including BRS and Connect-Ability;

- The Board of Education and Services for the Blind;

- The Office of Workforce Competitiveness;

- The Connecticut community college system;

- Career Resources (the state's One-Stop Center operator); and

- The Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County.

As the team's work progressed, it became clear that additional groups needed to be represented. As a result, representatives from the Connecticut BLN, the Department of Administrative Services, all state Workforce Investment Boards, the Connecticut Business and Industry Association, and the governor's Committee on People with Disabilities were added to the team.

The Manager of Strategic Initiatives for The WorkPlace, Inc. (Joyce Barcley) and the governor's Southwest Office representative (Chris Tymniak) co-chair the team. Committees were established around each of the three major goals to provide structure to the work. (See Appendix B for a list of Connecticut team members.)

The Actions: Accomplishments to Date

Although the Connecticut team originally set out on an admittedly ambitious course of action, it recognized over time that the demands of the recession on state and local policymakers and practitioners gave it an opportunity to rethink what it could reasonably accomplish and in what timeframe. Using the SLII meetings to regroup and refocus, the Connecticut team has experienced considerable activity in the year since April 2009 and feels it is on track to achieve several major, practical initiatives, including:

- **Building better employer engagement strategies through coordination with the Connecticut BLN.** Working closely with the BLN is a key part of the team's employer engagement strategy. In cooperation with the state Department of Labor, the BLN conducted training on ADA (Americans with Disability Act) requirements. This training session was attended by major employers from across the state, including AT&T and WalMart. The BLN promotes Disability Mentoring Day in coordination with Connect-Ability and will sponsor a "Disability as Diversity" event during National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Future efforts with the BLN will focus on employer best practices. DPNs will be involved with initiatives as appropriate.

- **Building an employer toolkit.** According to team members, work is progressing quickly on an employer toolkit. It is the team's goal to tie the toolkit to the activities of the BLN. For Connecticut, the term "building" rather than "creating" a toolkit is intentional. The team found there were many existing employer toolkits and that its work was not so much creating a new toolkit as assembling the various pieces and best practices from those already in existence. The final toolkit will include information marketing American Recovery and Reinvestment Act resources that are tied to the employment of people with disabilities, on-the-job training opportunities, and other employer incentives.

- **Assistive Technology in the One-Stops.** A new idea that emanated from the state's participation in the April 2009 SLII team-building meeting was to ensure that all One-Stops have technology available to assist people with disabilities. The team conducted a survey of the One-Stops and community colleges to determine what technology each office currently has. Information from the surveys will be used to identify ways to fill gaps and share infrequently used resources such as Braille translators and embossers. In addition to filling gaps, the team would like to incorporate a plan for training and technical assistance on the use of Assistive Technology. The team believes its survey tool can be shared with other states.

- **Connecticut as a model employer.** The team added a representative from the state's Department of Administrative Services to help examine state hiring practices and develop a model employer initiative. The plan is to create a checklist of resources that are available to both public and private employers and to provide fact sheets about topics such as diversity, mentoring, and job shadowing. The fact sheets will be another product available to other states as a direct result of the SLII. The team is considering whether Connecticut should emulate Maine in developing legislation that would include people with disabilities as an affirmative action group, or follow California's example and create an Executive Order. To truly become a model employer, the team acknowledges that managers responsible for hiring throughout state agencies will need training, particularly given the number of positions that have opened due to retirements.

- **Incorporating Universal Design principles.** Groundwork for Universal Design in the One-Stops was laid in past pilot projects that focused on welfare recipients and people with learning disabilities. Most recently, the team has decided that Universal Design activities are an important part of its capacity-building efforts. The team's plans include developing training for local staff on the use of Assistive Technology. These activities also fit well with the team's desire to inculcate more inclusive policies and practices into the state's workforce system.

- **Building on the success of Connect-Ability.**[9] The Connecticut team elected to make Connect-Ability, funded through a MIG, the new centerpiece of its efforts and the foundation upon which to build stronger capacity. Connect-Ability is viewed as the most sustainable piece of systems transformation and a flagship for marketing and communication. Connect-Ability involves looking at the state's employment and disability services infrastructure in order to identify problem areas and implement lasting solutions. Connect-Ability has two primary customers:

- Employers of all sizes and in all industries who are seeking qualified workers, and

- People with disabilities of all ages who are seeking employment.

Connect-Ability does not directly provide services to match individuals with specific jobs. Instead, efforts are targeted at removing the barriers that preclude job seekers and employers from finding each other. These barriers include low expectations, the transition from school to work, inadequate transportation, and the actual process of recruitment, hiring, and retention. Current Connect-Ability strategies include:

- **Systems Change.** Connecticut's first MIG funding created a buy-in program under Medicaid so that people no longer had to choose between working and having the health insurance and support services they need.

- **Employers.** Connect-Ability works with large corporations, mid-sized businesses, and small employers in all sectors, including government service.

- **People with Disabilities of All Ages.** Connect-Ability's target population is cross-disability and cross-generational. This means that members of the target population might have physical, sensory, emotional, and/or intellectual disabilities and might be high school students, people in their 30s or 40s, or people of retirement age.

Lessons Learned to Date and Remaining Challenges

Connecticut's participation in the SLII is greatly enhanced by the presence and strong support of the Office of the Governor and a unique collaboration of local and state leaders. Participation in the SLII has helped the state better understand its existing capacity and infrastructure strengths and weaknesses and prioritize where, how, and in what areas it needs to better invest resources to achieve the outcomes it desires. The momentum that was generated by the recent success of a collaboration of workforce development, economic development, and disability employment agencies in bringing to Connecticut a Walgreens distribution center that employs people with disabilities encouraged team members. The SLII provided an opportunity to build on that momentum. However, the onset of the national recession interfered with Connecticut's SLII efforts.

Connecticut's participation in the SLII is greatly enhanced by the presence and strong support of the Office of the Governor and a unique collaboration of local and state leaders. Participation in the SLII has helped the state better understand its existing capacity and infrastructure strengths and weaknesses and prioritize where, how, and in what areas it needs to better invest resources to achieve its desired outcomes.

While the Connecticut team sees great promise in enhancing employer engagement through the Connecticut BLN and has embraced focusing on Universal Design as a vehicle for improving "to work" services for a myriad of job seekers, including people with disabilities, it recognizes that some key challenges remain. These include:

- **Increasing business awareness.** Lack of business awareness of the talents of people with disabilities is a core challenge. Team members expressed concern that businesses do not yet understand how they can better use people with disabilities as a human capital resource. Businesses tend to believe that people with disabilities do not have adequate experience in the workplace; represent a liability to the company, including concerns about legal liability concerning hiring and firing, for example; or may require exorbitantly expensive accommodations. Small companies usually have no human resources staff who can advise the owner about hiring and accommodating people with disabilities and large companies are reluctant to change their current hiring practices, some of which might inadvertently exclude individuals with disabilities. Connecticut is confident it can meet this challenge through a stronger partnership with, and investment in, the Connecticut BLN, as well as the regional Business Services Teams supporting One-Stop operations. Toward this end, in October 2009, Connect-Ability sponsored an Employer Summit attended by nearly 200 people.

- **Ongoing economic challenges.** In the current recession, employers are leery of hiring in general, and even more so of hiring people with perceived barriers to employment. Even the state itself, as an employer, has been affected by the recession. Although the governor issued a letter to all commissioners urging them to hire people with disabilities, mass retirements and state hiring freezes delayed work on the goal of the state becoming a model employer. Connecticut believes the groundwork needs to begin now to increase the recruitment and hiring of people with disabilities in state jobs in anticipation of better economic days.

- **Perception issues.** In many cases, Connecticut team members have witnessed that some families, staff, and employers do not expect individuals with disabilities to work in competitive employment. People with disabilities may also perceive themselves as unable to work because they have become accustomed to receiving benefits through Social Security disability programs. To them, employment carries with it the potential for losing benefits. As such, Connecticut feels more work needs to be done through effective marketing and communication about the positive benefits of working in a competitive employment for people with disabilities.

- **Coordination issues.** Collaboration efforts have routinely pointed out that state agencies work in isolation on their budgeting, planning, and procurement. They and their local grantees develop requests for proposals for training programs without looking for opportunities to interweave and leverage funds. Programs serving people with disabilities are spread among multiple agencies in Connecticut without an overall coordinating body to oversee alignment of goals and strategies. Stronger partnerships and better relationship building and communication, Connecticut believes, can serve to reduce silos.

- **Communications issues.** According to team members, inadequate communication among providers is a critical and ongoing barrier to providing better services to people with disabilities, although great strides have been made. At the first SLII team-building event in July 2008, members of the state team — all of whom had been involved in some way with disability employment services — were enthused to learn about Connect-Ability. Surprisingly, they knew little, if anything, about it until they arrived at the team-building event. The opportunity that the SLII event presented for people to get away from their daily obligations and spend concentrated time together as a full group was highly valuable for learning what each agency was already doing in the disability employment area. NTAR Leadership Center participation was a catalyst for having conversations that had not taken place previously.

The Maryland Story: Making Access for People with Disabilities a Reality in a Region Poised for an Influx of New Jobs

Maryland has moved into the vanguard of states that have made workforce preparation and creation a priority, having recognized the value in the depth and diversity of its population and the likelihood of labor shortages in a number of the state's critical industries. For Maryland, all residents working in the state are seen as a vital component of the state's economic engine. Therefore, when Maryland applied to participate in the State Leaders Innovation Institute (SLII), the state was already highly motivated and extremely committed to identifying and adopting best practices that expedite the entry of people with disabilities into the Maryland economy. As noted by Governor O'Malley in the state's application to the SLII:

> As Governor, I have made workforce creation a priority of my Administration. Guided by the principle that "there is no such thing as a spare Marylander," we are aggressively seeking to integrate our economic and workforce activities and to create new pathways to the workforce for populations that have traditionally faced barriers. We are committed to ensuring that all of our economic development and workforce creation initiatives include opportunities for individuals with disabilities. (Governor Martin O'Malley, March 27, 2008)[10]

Understanding that Maryland is a richly diverse state and recognizing the need for creative and proactive policies for populations that have traditionally faced barriers to employment, the governor established a strong leadership team that would work to better promote and integrate unemployed and underemployed individuals into the fabric of Maryland's 21st century economy. At the time of the state's entry into the SLII, Maryland was the only state in the nation to have a cabinet-level agency, the Department of Disabilities under the leadership of Secretary Catherine Raggio, charged with unifying and improving the delivery of services to people with disabilities. The state also had recently put in place new leadership in the workforce area as well, including Secretary of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation Thomas Perez, and Eric Seleznow, Executive Director of the Governor's Workforce Investment Board (GWIB), each of whom possessed a wealth of skills and knowledge of workforce issues and the state and local workforce systems.

Ready for Pioneering Change

For Maryland officials, the impetus for participating in the SLII was the realization that in the next few years, the state will experience the largest job growth occurring at any one time since the end of the Second World War. As a result of the federal government's 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) decisions, the state was expecting new jobs to be created in or relocated to Maryland. As far as state officials were concerned, over the next few years, the state would need to be prepared to welcome thousands of new residents and new jobs in an unprecedented economic expansion, challenging infrastructure, housing, and education systems. As noted by state officials, the state's military facilities and the surrounding areas could grow by as many as 60,000 additional persons as a result of jobs transferred to Maryland by the Department of Defense, including civilian personnel, contractors, and dependents. BRAC offered tremendous opportunities to all Marylanders, and ensuring that persons with disabilities are included in those

opportunities was a significant driving force behind Maryland's decision to participate in the SLII. For the state leadership, BRAC was a singular, unprecedented opportunity to promote individuals with disabilities as potential recruits for many of the thousands of anticipated federal and private-sector jobs.

Therefore, Maryland's objectives for participating in the SLII were targeted, focused, and clear. They were:

- Identify and link job seekers with disabilities to opportunities made available as a result of the 2005 BRAC,

- Enhance the skills of job seekers with disabilities by retooling or realigning existing training programs and dollars,

- Determine work incentives and strategies to ensure that "work pays" for individuals with disabilities, and

- Develop livable and inclusive communities.

Maryland has a strong history of providing equal opportunities to persons with disabilities and takes seriously the ongoing challenges of integrating all persons into the state's communities, education system, and the world of work. Its history of initiatives that set the stage for partnerships and integration of disability and employment initiatives include:

- **Disability Navigators.** Maryland implemented a multi-year project to address the needs of individuals with disabilities seeking employment and training through the One-Stop Career Center system through a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration.

- **Customized Employment.** Two Maryland areas won Customized Employment grants from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy to implement a multi-year project to design a model for systemic inclusion of individuals with significant disabilities in the One-Stop Career Center system by aligning, blending, and integrating the resources of various partners. Customized Employment pilots took place in Frederick County and Montgomery County.

- **WorkFORCE Promise.** Maryland's WorkFORCE Promise was funded by an ODEP WorkFORCE Action Grant. The purpose of the grant was to promote the personal and professional independence of individuals with disabilities by effecting systems change to eliminate barriers to employment.

Guided by the principle that "there is no such thing as a spare Marylander," we are aggressively seeking to integrate our economic and workforce activities and to create new pathways to the workforce for populations that have traditionally faced barriers.

For Maryland, BRAC was singular, unprecedented opportunity to promote individuals with disabilities as potential recruits for many of the thousands of anticipated federal and private-sector jobs.

- **Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG).** As of 2009, the MIG funds are being administered by the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD). The goal of the MIG program is to support people with disabilities in securing and sustaining competitive employment in an integrated setting. The MIG funds cover the costs of an employer outreach staff member at MDOD, an internship coordinator, development of a web portal, and the data costs associated with a data system known as WorkStat, among other activities.

- **Governor's Transitioning Youth Initiative (GTYI).** The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) funds supported employment and other day services with dedicated state funding made available through the GTYI. The initiative serves eligible students "aging out" of public education services who otherwise may not have received DDA services. The Maryland DDA and the state's public vocational rehabilitation services program, the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), to serve transition youth entering supported employment are included in the collaboration.

- **U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Transition-Aged Youth Grant.** The Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative (MSTC) is administered by DORS, the state's vocational rehabilitation services program. The collaborative establishes TransCen, Inc. as the statewide technical assistance center for the implementation of evidence-based transition practices that lead to success by young adults with significant disabilities in entering employment and postsecondary education. It is anticipated that by 2012, the MSTC model will be implemented in at least 10 of the state's 24 local education areas.

- **Participation in National Governors Association (NGA) Policy Academies on Sector Strategies and Economic Clusters.** An inter-departmental team led by the governor's office is currently participating in an NGA policy academy focused on sector strategies to create and develop new economic and workforce development initiatives that would provide opportunities for a broad range of Maryland residents, including people with disabilities. The state had previously participated in a policy academy on state strategies for promoting innovative clusters and regional economies and the governor's Workforce Investment Board's Center for Industry Initiatives has helped to develop a nationally recognized, demand-driven, and cluster-based approach to workforce development.

- **A Sustained Assistive Technology Loan Program.** All states have a version of an Assistive Technology program for people with disabilities, making access to often-expensive equipment (such as Braille embossers and TTY/TDD conversion modems) possible. While these programs often suffer from under-funding, Maryland had the foresight to secure public and private funding for its Assistive Technology loan program. Currently, the roughly $5 million program includes loan funds for Assistive Technology and other devices for individuals with disabilities to help them "live, work, and learn more independently."[11]

- **Transitional Housing Options.** To assist persons transitioning out of institutions and nursing homes, MDOD partnered with the state's Department of Housing to create a "bridge" subsidy program that provides rent support until permanent housing can be secured. The Bridge Subsidy Demonstration Program is a pilot that provides state-funded, short-term rental assistance (up to three years) for a limited number of eligible individuals with disabilities (75-100 total) who are receiving Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance cash payments while these individuals await permanent housing assistance.

- **Continuous Improvement of Transportation.** MDOD also partners with the state's Department of Transportation to monitor and improve paratransit. Mobility/paratransit programs are a "curb-to-curb" service for people with disabilities who are not able to ride fixed-route public transportation.

Like many states, Maryland is challenged to link these multiple initiatives together and to integrate them into the policy and service practices of agencies where disability issues are not mission central. For Maryland, participation in the SLII offered a unique opportunity to make more headway in this regard. According to state officials, their participation in the SLII came at an opportune time to test how policy and service connections could work in a region preparing for a major job expansion.

The Unique Maryland Environment for Innovation and Leadership

In Maryland, the groundwork for systems change was being developed and growing simultaneously on the workforce development front, through its participation in two NGA workforce development-related policy academies and on the disability-centric front, through the creation of the MDOD. In addition, several factors established an environment in Maryland conducive to effecting change to better prepare untapped and "emerging" populations, including youth transitioning from school to work and individuals with disabilities, for entry into the workforce. For instance:

- **Creation of MDOD.** Maryland took a bold step in 2004 by creating the nation's first ever cabinet-level Department of Disabilities. MDOD is charged with unifying and improving the delivery of services to people with disabilities by working collaboratively with all state government agencies. The work of this department gives leverage to the need for systems to align their services in ways that open access to persons with all types of disabilities to succeed. Without this leverage and authority, most states struggle to bring agencies together, fail to understand the disconnects, and in the long run fail to make the kind of systems change needed for individuals with disabilities to live and work independently. Governor O'Malley appointed the Secretary of MDOD to the state's Workforce Investment Board and asked her to lead the efforts related to the NTAR Leadership Center project.

- **An Effective State Disabilities Plan.** The Maryland State Disabilities Plan[12] identifies opportunities for partnerships across agencies that will improve services for persons with disabilities and establish ways to evaluate how these agencies are serving people with disabilities. The state plan is updated every year, providing a "high-touch" way for MDOD to connect with diverse agencies and their programs. State law requires units of government

to submit proposed rules and regulations to MDOD. These rules and regulations must be accompanied by an impact statement stating how the proposed rule or regulation relates to people with disabilities. All agencies must also submit all disability-related waivers and grants for MDOD's concurrence.

- **Workforce Development Sub-Cabinet.** Convened by the governor, the sub-cabinet meets periodically to provide a venue for identifying and resolving barriers between systems. This sub-cabinet group includes

    - MDOD;

    - The Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation (DLLR);

    - The governor's Workforce Investment Board;

    - The Department of Business and Economic Development;

    - The Higher Education Commission;

    - The Department of Human Resources;

    - The Department of Aging; and

    - The Department of Veterans Affairs.

- **The Inter-Agency Workforce Committee of the GWIB.** In September 2009, the GWIB passed a Universal Design resolution. The goal of the resolution was to assist workforce development system partners, One-Stop Centers, and other stakeholders to institute policies and practices that reflect the best principles of Universal Design in the delivery of workforce development services. In addition, the GWIB established an Interagency Workforce Committee charged with oversight and assistance with DLLR's efforts to implement Universal Design principles in the One-Stops. Membership of the GWIB Interagency Workforce Committee includes assistant secretaries or others in leadership positions from:

    - The DLLR's Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning;

    - MDOD;

    - The state Department of Education, including both the divisions of Rehabilitation Services and Career and College Readiness, and the Department of Business and Economic Development;

    - The Department of Housing and Community Development;

- The Department of Juvenile Services;

- The Maryland Higher Education Commission;

- The Department of Aging; and

- The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services.

This standing committee of the Board is designed to "institutionalize the cooperation and collaboration among the partner agencies." Meeting agenda items include discussing timely issues, identifying strategies to increase coordination among workforce programs and services, and assisting in the implementation of the GWIB strategic plan.

- **BRAC Sub-Cabinet.** Many Workforce Development sub-cabinet members overlap on a complementary BRAC sub-cabinet, making connections and integrated conversations more likely. These ongoing conversations are grounded in a BRAC action plan,[13] jointly created by multiple agencies, and intended to be a roadmap across inter-connected strategy areas, including economic development, workforce and education, housing, and transportation. The Maryland NTAR Leadership Center state team is identifying parallel recommendations to the state's BRAC action plan that will promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the major action areas outlined below. According to state officials, these conversations would not have occurred absent the impetus from the NTAR Leadership Center effort.

- **The Governor's Support and Leadership.** Maryland is fortunate that Governor O'Malley and his predecessors have placed a high priority on transitioning people with disabilities into full community and work participation. Governor O'Malley has often spoken about the three S's: security, sustainability, and skills. He understands that for the state to be successful and attract companies, it cannot leave any Marylanders behind. The governor has made an explicit call to action to improve policies and services so that individuals with disabilities may live full and independent lives. He sends a powerful message when he speaks of there being "No Spare Marylander" and explicitly includes people with disabilities in this charge. The governor has demonstrated his commitment to this priority by adding $2.3 million to the state's Rehabilitation Services Agency budget in FY 2009.

While many of the projects operating in Maryland helped to improve supply-side training and local systems change related to disability services, state officials note that this locally driven approach had not yet translated into sustainable state workforce systems change. For Maryland, better state-level partnerships were still needed. Under the SLII, connecting these initiatives across state systems is an important goal, which had previously been the responsibility of the Maryland Department of Disability. The SLII offered the state a chance to better inter-connect the work of key state agencies under the priority of BRAC.

The inter-agency team that participates in the SLII understands that any steps toward its goals must be contextualized in a larger, integrated approach to economic prosperity and must build toward a more cohesive system that serves individuals with disabilities effectively, efficiently, and comprehensively. These driving forces led the team to establish 12 areas for work leading up to the 2011 arrival of BRAC jobs. The strategy areas include:

- Developing shared longitudinal data across economic, workforce development, and disability employment sectors;

- Defining roles and responsibilities at the state and local levels in support of those measures;

- Developing or reframing appropriate inter-agency memoranda of understanding;

- Developing integrated sector strategies to include people with disabilities;

- Identifying existing generic regional and statewide training programs/curricula and ensuring access for individuals with disabilities;

- Retooling existing training programs to meet the skill needs of employers;

- Developing an "Essential Workplace Skills" curriculum that will be available online and marketed to all community colleges to develop "soft skills" in job seekers with disabilities, as well as other untapped populations;

- Developing a mechanism for identifying individuals with disabilities statewide and linking them to demand-driven training programs and employment opportunities;

- Ensuring that economic development plans include accessible and affordable housing and transportation;

- Engaging employers;

- Utilizing Universal Design as a framework for workforce systems; and

- Increasing economic self-sufficiency of employed individuals with disabilities through programs and services such as benefits counseling, Medicaid Buy-in, Bridge Subsidy, guaranteed low-interest loans, and other related asset development.

Maryland's Vision and Goals Under the SLII Effort

The Vision: Integrated Economic Prosperity for All

Maryland envisioned three prioritized goals that related to its four objectives for participation in the SLII and more broadly in its work to ensure that people with disabilities are included in the economic benefits brought by the BRAC expansion. These prioritized goals were:

- Increase partnerships and collaboration among and across generic and disability-specific systems that provide employment and support services;

- Increase economic self-sufficiency through leveraging relevant generic and disability-specific tax incentives, financial education, and other strategies for enhancing profitable employment to enable persons with disabilities to accrue assets; and

- Increase the use of Universal Design as the framework for the organization of employment policy and the implementation of employment services.

For the Maryland team, measurable success will be defined by the number of workers with disabilities filling BRAC jobs, traveling to their work through an enhanced transportation network, and living in accessible housing in the communities where they work.

The 2008 BRAC Action Plan Progress Report: A Snapshot

Activity is categorized in four major action areas — infrastructure and housing, transportation, workforce development and education, and economic development and small minority business. Plans in these areas include:

- **Infrastructure and Housing.** Encouraging local governments to adopt inclusionary zoning solutions and expand rental housing opportunities, implementing the Workforce Housing Grant Program, and assessing the feasibility of the Rent Where You Work Program to encourage renters to live close to their place of employment.

- **Transportation.** Promoting seamless transit connections and customer convenience to and on military installations; providing continual ride-share coordination; promoting transit options, cost-effective carpooling, and van pooling; and expanding pedestrian and bicycle access.

- **Workforce Development and Education.** Providing targeted outreach to qualified job seekers for BRAC-related positions; aligning adult education programs, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families employment programs, and mature worker programs in workforce development; and expanding partnerships with businesses, apprenticeship programs, and industry associations to create internships and employment opportunities for Maryland high school students.

- **Economic Development and Small Minority Business.** Tracking BRAC-related minority business outcomes to measure minority business BRAC success, increasing capital available to minority businesses for bonding and business expansion, and implementing BRAC zones to provide local jurisdictions incentives to redevelop areas that can be utilized for BRAC employer and residential locations.

However, the team recognizes that the number of individuals with disabilities served and placed in jobs is different than and perhaps less important than systems change itself, which it believes is not easily measured. According to team members, "If you change systems, you still have something when the grant ends. We're now looking at the NTAR Leadership Center project in terms of what it can do to create a model for systems change, particularly in an environment that's rich with job opportunities."[14]

If successful, the team believes it will see the following:

- **Disability is not an afterthought in community planning.** Consideration for disabilities is part of the process that developers and builders think about when planning communities.

- **Employers develop job descriptions differently.** Traditionally, employers write a job description and then search for a person to fit that job. An alternative approach would be searching for a quality employee and then developing a job description that is customized based on both the tasks an employer needs completed and an individual's skills.

- **Universal Design principles are adopted by the One-Stop System.** MDOD is interested in working with the GWIB to develop a strategic plan for improving access for people with disabilities at the state's One-Stop Centers. Toward this end, the Secretary of the MDOD submitted a resolution on Universal Design that was adopted by the GWIB in September 2009. The GWIB, MDOD, and DLLR are currently developing plans to use NTAR Leadership Center technical assistance resources to implement the Universal Design resolution. One-Stops should be fully accessible to all job seekers physically and in terms of services and resources.

- **The performance measurement and management system provides timely and accurate data about people with disabilities.** Good data is important to Maryland's governor. Maryland's StateStat system was implemented to make state government more accountable and a BRACStat system was similarly implemented to track BRAC activity and outcomes. The NTAR Leadership Center state team envisions a similar data system for employment programs for individuals with disabilities that will create timely and accurate intelligence, drive systems change, and support policy decisions.

- **Assistance with asset development and financial literacy are common practice.** With assistance from the NTAR Leadership Center, Maryland will access research on best practices and the elements of a comprehensive state asset development strategy. It is anticipated that the state will use this research to outline a comprehensive strategic initiative in asset development.

Products that the team anticipates will be developed from its efforts (and available to other states) include:

- BRAC fact sheets regarding credit history and security clearances,

- Memoranda of Understanding between state agencies in the area of employer outreach collaboration, and

- Requests for proposals the team has launched in relation to BRAC and disability employment and training.

The Team: Maryland's State Leadership Structure and Framework

Maryland assembled an outstanding team of individuals in an effort to ensure that the state would continue to be seen as a national leader in promoting the employment of individuals with disabilities. Team members included high-level state officials including:

- The Secretaries of the Maryland DLLR (Thomas Perez, team co-chair) and the MDOD (Catherine Raggio, team co-chair);

- The Executive Director of the BRAC sub-Cabinet;

- The Assistant State Superintendent for the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Rehabilitation Services;

- A representative of the President of Prince George's County Community College;

- The Director of Operations at MontgomeryWorks (local One-Stop Center);

- The Chief of Staff at the Department of Business and Economic Development;

- The Executive Director of the GWIB; and

- Business representatives from Northrop Grumman, a defense contractor, and large Maryland employer.

Additional active participants who have become key members of the team include:

- The Director of Employment Policy in the MDOD;

- The Special Assistant in the DLLR Division of Workforce Development;

- The BRAC Coordinator at the Department of Transportation; and

- The Legislative Director and Special Assistant for the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development. (See Appendix B for a list of Maryland team members.)

Although the team has proceeded as a single group rather than in committees or sub-teams, individual meetings are taking place as a result of relationships developed from team participation. The lengthy list of goals, objectives, and strategies has been made more manageable by the development of specific, concrete tasks that have been assigned to and accepted by relevant state

agencies. Team meetings have been used productively to review the status of each action item, determine barriers (such as resource limitations), and agree on resolutions.

The Actions: Accomplishments to Date

As noted earlier in this report, the Maryland team had four objectives when it began its participation in the SLII. These included connecting job seekers to BRAC job opportunities, enhancing their skills, putting in place strategies to support their employment and "make work pay," and developing inclusive communities in which to live and work.

To accomplish their goals and objectives, the team members dedicated their meetings to achieving the following activities:

BRAC Action Plan Inclusions. Participation in the SLII was the catalyst needed for the inclusion of recommendations specific to individuals with disabilities in the BRAC action plan. The team used the BRAC action plan structure for outlining specific tasks that will help them attain their goals. Examples from each action planning category include:

Infrastructure and Housing

- Refine an existing inventory of state-funded affordable housing opportunities (current and projected) to be categorized based on their accessibility features,

- Include a section in the housing finder that looks for proximity to accessible transportation,

- Promote Universal Design in existing outreach and training materials and educate both developers and purchasers, and

- Create a resource list of contractors with experience in accessible alterations.

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Transportation

- Ensure that the Maryland Transit Administration's MARC (regional rail) stations are accessible and that accessible connecting transportation is available,

- Include accessibility requirements in licensing procedures for taxis at airports, and

- Ensure that disability-friendly language is included in all requests for proposals as it relates to transit-oriented development.

Workforce Development and Education

- Develop an employer survey to obtain details on job qualifications, where employers recruit, and their policies and practices for telework;

- Conduct an employer focus group with employers identified as likely to relocate from Fort Monmouth, New Jersey to Maryland;

- Create a cross-agency portal targeting employers interested in hiring individuals with disabilities linked into a national marketing campaign targeting employers;

- Create an Essential Workplace Skills curriculum to be made available to all community colleges; and

- Create a white paper of all the macro- and micro-data available on the workforce of people with disabilities and link it to BRAC efforts.

Rethinking Housing Planning. Department of Housing and Community Development staff believe that as a result of the team's focus on BRAC, their programs will change to better take into account people with disabilities who intend to work. Instead of just thinking about "is this unit accessible?," they will now think about "how is this person going to live and work?" The housing representative on the team stated, "What opened in my mind is that this person has to work, so how are they going to get there and be successful? We are able now to see the nexus of where you work, where you live, how you get around. You have an affordable, mobility friendly way to get to work. You have affordable, accessible housing. We are putting housing in that context and that has been a big benefit of working on this project. Learning the workforce piece was big for me." Housing-related efforts have included:

- Hosting a meeting attended by local housing and disability staff on transit-oriented development in BRAC areas. The Maryland Department of Transportation spoke about target growth areas and the development process.

- Research on best practices in asset development and financial literacy is being conducted with the goal of developing a state "to work" strategy that includes asset building and a financial literacy curriculum.

- MDOD personnel are monitoring the implementation of housing action steps by the Department of Housing and Community Development.

MDOD and DLLR Memorandum of Understanding/Agreement. MDOD and DLLR sought to transform the relationship between the workforce development system and services for individuals with disabilities through a groundbreaking Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies, signed on May 29, 2009. Under the agreement, MDOD leverages DLLR's expertise and connections with the employer community by providing MIG and SLII grant funds to DLLR for intensive workshops and employer engagement. This joint venture includes:

- Day-long workshops for people with disabilities to provide information on employment options. MDOD will provide speakers and handouts; DLLR will select accessible venues and recruit and register participants.

- A full-time staff person, jointly approved by MDOD and DLLR, who will report to the Assistant Secretary for Workforce Development and Adult Learning, to fulfill the employer outreach and other NTAR Leadership Center activities. DLLR will:

  - Identify businesses interested in hiring or creating internships for people with disabilities, with an emphasis on BRAC opportunities. The Maryland team conducted an employer focus group in April 2009 to learn about BRAC employer hiring needs and recruitment;

  - Identify company champions willing to share success stories with other companies;

  - In partnership with MDOD, develop a centralized source of information, including a dedicated employer Web site;

  - Create a sustainable statewide business-led promotional and networking group; and

  - Engage in systems change at the agency level that supports increased employment of people with disabilities.

BRAC-Focused Job Fairs. MDOD provided funds to support a job fair for individuals with disabilities held at Aberdeen Proving Ground, as well as intensive job seeker workshops in two of the BRAC regions, Harford County and Anne Arundel County. In addition, marketing materials encouraging the hiring of individuals with disabilities are being included in the state's BRAC relocation guide, more than 11,000 copies of which will be distributed.

Using AmeriCorps Volunteer. MDOD hired an AmeriCorps volunteer to do outreach to college students with disabilities in an effort to develop their career skills and to link them to internships such as the Workforce Recruitment Program operated by ODEP.

By the Numbers: WorkStat. With technical assistance from the NTAR Leadership Center, the team is making progress on the development of a cross-agency employment data system for an online resource entitled WorkStat. WorkStat will complement the governor's existing StateStat and BRACStat, providing data intelligence for policy making. A white paper is in development of all the macro- and micro-data available on Marylanders with disabilities as a potential workforce.

Encouraging Universal Design. The state has begun the process of discussing Universal Design principles at its annual state workforce development conference and most recently, the GWIB approved a resolution supporting the use of Universal Design principles in the state's One-Stop Career Centers.

Lessons Learned to Date and Remaining Challenges

Maryland's participation in the SLII, with its strong, state-level leadership and focus of purpose, has helped give the state a chance to better inter-connect the work of key state agencies under the priority of BRAC. State officials feel they are on their way to meeting their goals and objectives, but believe key challenges remain. According to Maryland team members, the following have been identified as the most pressing challenges for the state as it continues to move toward greater systems change through participation in the SLII:

- **Limited quick-win opportunities.** A significant issue in maintaining engagement and enthusiasm for the Maryland team is the long-term nature of BRAC economic development. When partners and local stakeholders are not able to see quick concrete action and results, it can be difficult to maintain interest. It may be years before success is measurable, making quick wins difficult to demonstrate. The downturn in the economy has also resulted in a reduction in the number of anticipated BRAC jobs that will be available to Marylanders, with more out-of-state people currently in those jobs deciding to relocate to Maryland rather than face the bleak job market; this has affected funding for economic development and housing.

- **Resource stove-pipes.** Increasing the employment rate of persons with disabilities is not simply an employment issue. Progress must be made simultaneously on several fronts, including transportation, housing, financial education, and postsecondary education. However, federal and state resources are stove-piped in ways that make connecting the pieces difficult. Helping a person succeed requires multiple systems to align and work together. For example, the team would like to promote asset development, but cannot do that without supportive state policy and an improved benefits counseling infrastructure.

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- **Lack of rewards for collaboration.** One of the biggest challenges MDOD has found is that there are few rewards for cross-agency partnering, partly because of the state budgeting process, which reinforces the stove-pipes, and because of the nature of the federal resource silos.

- **Employer engagement.** As with the other states in the SLII, employer engagement is a major challenge. According to Maryland officials, the conversation with employers about hiring people with disabilities has not fully changed. MDOD employs a communications staffer responsible for helping the team with messaging. The Memorandum of Understanding between MDOD and the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, and the Memorandum of Agreement between MDOD and DLLR are intended to address this challenge.

- **Further integrating supply-side and high-wage, high-skill, demand-side workforce development efforts for individuals with disabilities.** In addition to the job demands that BRAC brings, Maryland has prioritized specific industry clusters for growth, including: aerospace, business services, construction, finance and insurance, hospitality and tourism, bioscience, communications, education, health care, and information technology. Meeting the skilled workforce needs of these industries with current employment and training services is no easy task, and is even more difficult for persons with disabilities.

Nationally, youth with disabilities participate in postsecondary programs at only one-quarter the rate of those without disabilities and at one-third the rate attained by economically disadvantaged youth. According to 2005 Census Bureau data, only 38% of Americans with disabilities aged 21-64 were employed compared to 78% of Americans without disabilities.[15] In retrospect, MDOD Secretary Raggio feels the team would have benefited from including a member of the Higher Education Commission. She wants to see people with disabilities advance in their skills. Higher education is the key to higher skills and higher-wage jobs.

The Minnesota Story: Systems Change within the Context of Inclusive Regional Prosperity

When Minnesota applied to participate in the State Leaders Innovation Institute (SLII) in the spring of 2008, the state was well-positioned to become a pioneering leader of creative models to move people with disabilities to employment. Economic conditions were promising and Minnesota was one of a handful of states leading the nation in workforce participation rates for people with disabilities. The state could point to years of innovative policy initiatives in workforce development, economic development, and disability employment systems and was in a strong position to build on its already established models of collaboration and partnerships.

Before the signing of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, the state had already integrated its vocational rehabilitation program into all of its WorkForce Centers (the name Minnesota gives its One-Stop Centers) and further integrated its business outreach services for people with disabilities within its overall business outreach services in these WorkForce Centers. In addition, Minnesota was one of just two states (along with Georgia) that included vocational rehabilitation (Title IV in the WIA) in its WIA unified plan with Titles I and II, including strong coordination with Title II. Furthermore, the state legislature had embraced the notion of aligning workforce development and economic development by creating, in 2003, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), which included both WIA and vocational rehabilitation staff. This new agency was charged with using demand-driven strategies to link workforce and economic development goals. Furthermore, Minnesota had already launched a comprehensive regional economic competitiveness effort for linking education, workforce development, and economic development. This included the award of eight Minnesota Sectoral Partnerships grants that allowed specific adaptations of skill training to support access into high-wage, high-skill jobs.

By 2005, the state had developed a five-year strategic plan through its Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG), the Department of Human Services' Pathways to Employment program, of which DEED was a major partner and stakeholder, to increase the competitive employment of people with disabilities. Under the plan, the state set out an ambitious agenda to build a more comprehensive and coordinated system of services and supports for Minnesotans with disabilities. From 2005 to 2010, Minnesota received over $20 million in MIG funds, one of the highest grant awards in the nation.

Ready for Pioneering Change

For Minnesota state officials, the motivating factors for participating in the SLII were:

■ Recognition that despite having one of the nation's highest rates of workforce participation for people with disabilities, there is much more to do to ensure meaningful employment for all those who want to work;

■ Desire to build on the state's demonstrated models of collaboration and partnership;

- Understanding that changing demographics demand new workforce strategies; and

- An aspiration to link disparate systems change efforts, namely Pathways to Employment and Sectoral Partnerships, into a statewide concerted effort that ensures all Minnesotans have access to the training and supports they need to enter high-skill, high-wage jobs.

As noted by Governor Pawlenty in the state's application to the SLII,

Minnesota is one of a handful of states which lead the nation in workforce participation rates for people with disabilities. However, we have much more to accomplish to ensure meaningful employment for all who want to participate in the workforce. Your selection of Minnesota as a participant in the Institute would support our efforts and ongoing leadership development...I stand ready to challenge our state agencies to continue with innovative efforts that will allow all Minnesotans to contribute their talents as we strive to foster a competitive business climate in Minnesota. (Governor Tim Pawlenty, March 26, 2008)[16]

According to state officials, a plethora of state-led projects already emphasized partnerships and the integration of disability and employment initiatives in the state. These initiatives significantly contributed to setting the stage for Minnesota's participation in the SLII and included:

- **Pathways to Employment (PTE).** One important effort to effect disability employment systems change is Minnesota's Pathways to Employment Comprehensive Employment Opportunities — MIG, a partnership that included DEED and the Department of Human Services and the Minnesota Council on Disability. PTE funds have supported — and continue to support — a large number of groundbreaking initiatives, including but not limited to:

  - *State as a Model Employer:* Under this initiative, paid internships are used to teach skills driven by government agency needs and to hire managers in state WorkForce Centers, state agencies, and the private sector as a way of developing personal qualifications that will position Minnesotans with disabilities to be seen as competitive employees. Vocational Rehabilitation Services, in partnership with PTE and the Minnesota Management and Budget state agency, funds a full-time recruiter who is working with cabinet-level officials to develop effective ways of recruiting and employing persons with disabilities to fill state government jobs. The state is updating its succession plan, which addresses how it will prepare for its future workforce needs in anticipation of Baby Boomer and other retirements. The recruiter is part of the team working to incorporate the Pathways strategy into long-term succession planning.

  - *SEEDS/MnDOT:* A competitive paid internship program that provides internship opportunities for people with disabilities in high-demand areas within the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

  - *Disability Venture:* An entrepreneur development initiative in partnership with DEED's Office of Entrepreneurship and Vocational Rehabilitation Services where two small business development centers and two micro-enterprise development organizations received two-year grants to provide entrepreneurship consultation to people with disabilities in partnership with traditional disability service providers.

- *Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Business Services Specialists Information:* The development of business-specific information for the DEED Business Services Specialists.

- *WorkForce Centers as Employment Networks under the Social Security Administration's Ticket-to-Work Program:* The state is piloting the establishment of Employment Networks as part of WorkForce Centers in Minnesota.

- *Camps to Careers:* A project that is based on Universal Design principles that uses an integrated and collaborative planning process with multiple stakeholders to create a hands-on setting where youth with disabilities have opportunities to explore high-wage careers in manufacturing and health care, combined with a structured career and personal development process.

During Pathways to Employment planning, state agency officials reported that a stronger trusted relationship had been generated between DEED and the Department of Human Services (DHS), resulting in a new ability to share information and make joint decisions.

- **Business Services Initiative.** In 2004, DEED's Workforce Development Division implemented a Business Services initiative that employs 38 business services specialists statewide to assess business needs and develop solutions in coordination with workforce and economic development staff. Vocational Rehabilitation Services has dedicated resources to hire six of the specialists with disability expertise. They provide intermediary services between the business services of the universal and disability workforce systems. This is a demand-side complement to the Disability Navigators.

- **Disability Program Navigators (DPNs).** Minnesota created four DPN positions under a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. The navigators provide technical assistance to WorkForce Center staff to effectively serve people with disabilities and ensure the WorkForce Centers are fully accessible, inclusive, and responsive to their needs.

- **Shifting Gears/FastTRAC (Training, Resources, and Credentialing) Initiative.** Several state agencies are core partners in a project funded by the Joyce Foundation to improve agencies' systemic approach to skill development among low-skill/low-wage workers. The Shifting Gears/ FastTRAC work is intended to create new entry points for underserved, low-wage, low-income adults into high-wage, high-skill jobs that are in demand in their communities. The project includes an emphasis on adapting a universal curriculum and customizing skill training and credentialing for a variety of skill-upgrading efforts.

- **Regional Economic Competitiveness, Sector Strategies, and Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED).** Minnesota's regional economic competitiveness efforts are centered on sector strategies, an approach that connects workforce, education, and economic development at the regional level (e.g., the U.S. Department of Labor's WIRED First Generation Grants). Sector strategies are industry-specific, regional approaches to employers' needs for skilled workers and workers' needs for good jobs. Minnesota is an emerging sector leader and was selected as one of five states by the National Governors Association (NGA) to participate in a 2006-2008 Policy Academy to advance state sector strategies. Minnesota made so much

progress that the state now acts as a "mentor" to other states developing state sector strategies. Because the state believes its future success will be based on innovation and talent and that developing talent requires strategic alliances and resource alignment, sector strategies are a logical policy choice. Sector strategies are a powerful tool for connecting and aligning multiple systems, funding streams, and efforts so that industry and job seekers can succeed.

It is important to Minnesota that these multiple efforts and policy priorities interconnect. According to DEED officials, the agency has spent time and effort to find points of intersection across the Shifting Gears/FastTRAC initiative and its sector strategy policies. As a result, Minnesota is considered at the cutting edge of aligning its demand- and supply-side strategies aimed at universal economic vitality.

The Unique Minnesota Environment for Innovation and Leadership

Minnesota's history of public policy innovation provided a foundation for its participation in the SLII. Predominantly, these efforts have included: locating Vocational Rehabilitation Services within the DEED; legislative leadership charging the governor's Workforce Development Council with the inclusion of disability employment into the mainstream of workforce initiatives; encouraging employment of persons with disabilities through Medicaid buy-in, the goal of which is to provide access, regardless of earnings, to a full range of medical, mental health, and long-term care services as a means of encouraging competitive employment for people with disabilities;[17] and implementation of a customer relations database.

- **Vocational Rehabilitation Services in Workforce Development and Economic Development.** The Vocational Rehabilitation Services program was not initially a division of the DEED. According to state officials, it was moved around several agencies, eventually ending up in the Department of Economic Security as a jobs program. This positioning proved to be invaluable in two ways. First, it caused workforce and economic development policymakers to think more inclusively about persons with disabilities, and secondly, it allowed the Vocational Rehabilitation Services program to view its clients as contributors to the economic vitality of the state. Minnesota was an early implementer of the one-stop concept and recognized that there was enormous organizational value in bringing Vocational Rehabilitation Services into its workforce system, and equal policy value in designating it as a jobs program first and foremost. Minnesota team members noted other benefits, namely that rehabilitation services are in better alignment with other state workforce development programs and thus create a more level playing field for employing people with disabilities.

- **State Legislative Leadership.** State leadership has been strong both within the DHS and DEED and at the legislative level. State officials noted that the legislature has remained interested in workforce development and the Minnesota WorkForce Center system by investing substantial state resources in the system.

- **The Governor's Workforce Development Council Leadership (GWDC).** The Council's charge includes language that disability employment efforts must work hand-in-hand with the state's mainstream workforce initiatives. The GWDC established a committee called Creating Connections in 2004-2005 to investigate why there was such a high unemployment rate

among people with disabilities and to formulate relevant recommendations to the governor for effective change. GWDC's first recommendation was for the state to become a model employer of people with disabilities. GWDC's second recommendation was that the state develop partnerships with businesses to share best practices and lessons learned so that they might also become model employers.

- **Medical Assistance for Employed Persons with Disabilities (MA-EPD) or Medicaid Buy-In.** One of the most significant barriers to people with disabilities in obtaining employment is the potential loss of public health insurance benefits. To address this barrier, Minnesota created a Medicaid Buy-In program that allow people with disabilities to continue Medicaid coverage when they become employed. Minnesota's MA-EPD program has been one of the most successful in the nation and has no income limit. Minnesota's commitment to employing people with disabilities is bolstered by the Buy-In program, which removes a common obstacle to employment for people with disabilities, namely the fear of losing health care coverage. And because there is no income limit, Minnesotans with disabilities at all income levels can work and continue to have access to the health care they need.

- **Customer Relations Management.** DEED has implemented a customer relations management database in cooperation with the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce that gives coordinated access to the business account activity of chambers of commerce in 40 state locations, along with several DEED offices. The database makes it possible for the business services staff of all partners, including Vocational Rehabilitation Services, to coordinate their services to prevent duplication and increase integration.

Minnesota's Vision and Goals Under the SLII Effort

The Vision: Inclusive Regional Economic Prosperity

The 2003 merger of two predecessor agencies to create DEED made an explicit link between Minnesota's statewide economic development and workforce development strategies and thus capitalized on the strong infrastructure already in place at the state level and in its local WorkForce Centers. To better address what state officials believed would be ongoing systems connectivity challenges, they made a strategic decision to organize the state's systems change efforts around regions that would involve and engage both the state **and** local entities to find solutions to improve individual and regional economic competitiveness. To achieve this goal, Minnesota launched a comprehensive economic competitiveness initiative to promote regional prosperity through eight sectoral partnerships using a sector-based approach to economic development that customizes links among education, workforce development, and economic development to fit each region's economy. To further improve its sector work, the state applied for and was selected to participate in an NGA 2008-2009 State Sector Strategies Academy hoping that its participation would further strengthen its demand-side focus and efforts.

The Minnesota SLII team members, a number of whom were key policymakers in the state's regional economic competitiveness initiative, determined they could use the sector-based approach to workforce development as a jumping-off point for their SLII activities. For them, the goal of inclusive economic prosperity fit in with the state's economic growth strategies and

its policy directions regarding inclusion and integration. And, as noted by the team members, inclusive economic prosperity was and remains a key driving force for change. As a result, the team elected to approach the linkage challenges under their SLII participation through sector work, beginning with the manufacturing sector.

The Team: Minnesota's State Leadership Structure and Framework

The Minnesota team was selected based on members' expertise and ability to add value to the further design and development of the work they envisioned under the SLII. Overall, the team is composed of state and local public officials and private individuals who have a strong passion for the work, bring many resources and connections to the table, and are leaders within their own organizations. (See Appendix B for list of Minnesota team members.) The team is led by Kathy Sweeney, Strategic Projects Director in the DEED.

Minnesota assembled a large team and brought the largest team of the three states to the required SLII team-building and peer network events that took place in July 2008 and April 2009. From the start, team members included high-level state officials, such as deputy commissioners, division directors, and program directors from DEED and DHS. The team established leadership goals, including: develop leadership at all levels, within and across organizations; include a wide and diverse team from among state, regional, and local leaders from government, community-based organizations, and advocacy organizations; work to change vocabulary, attitudes, and perceptions regarding people with disabilities and their ability to be gainfully employed; and work to clearly explain why change is needed. In response to these goals, it was important that the team include broad representation, and as a result the team also included individuals from a local disability service provider, a county WorkForce Center official, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, the Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council, the governor's Workforce Development Council, and a local Workforce Investment Board.

An important part of the Minnesota team members' effort was to get to know each other as a "team" and to develop a common vision and leadership principles that would guide their work. To do this, the team felt it needed a consensus on the course of action and priority steps it would take for moving forward. Team members believed the actions must have meaningful employment outcomes; that is, competitive jobs for persons with disabilities. They wanted to feel confident that they were on a course to help Minnesotans with disabilities get jobs and that what they did would benefit other job seekers. As such, they felt that incorporating Universal Design principles into their deliberations would make for a better workforce delivery system for all.

As noted earlier, team members also felt it was vital that that their efforts align with state policy, specifically linking employment and prosperity to the state's well-established regional economic development strategies. They also felt strongly that they wanted this team effort to be relevant and to "really make a difference." Finally, they also believed that part of the SLII team work needed to include a way to communicate what they were attempting to do. They defined their vision for success as full employment for people with disabilities that would result in a meaningful quality of life and contribute to community prosperity. After much deliberation as a team, the members adopted a single-sentence value proposition they felt communicated what they were attempting to achieve: "We need everyone in the workforce for businesses to thrive and communities to prosper."

The Minnesota Value Proposition

"We need everyone in the workforce for businesses to thrive and communities to prosper."

The team established leadership goals, including:

- Develop leadership at all levels, within and across organizations;

- Include a wide and diverse team from among state, regional, and local leaders from government, community-based organizations, and advocacy organizations;

- Work to change vocabulary, attitudes, and perceptions regarding people with disabilities and their ability to be gainfully employed; and

- Work to clearly explain why change is needed.

Team members initially believed they would move together as a whole team but soon discovered dividing the work was more practical and would allow for more engagement. As such, they organized themselves into three sub-teams to accomplish their work. The sub-teams were:

- A regional planning and prosperity alignment workgroup that looks at how regions prosper and how to make systems changes through integrated planning instead of duplicative and uncoordinated assessment and planning processes;

- A communications and outreach workgroup that looks at communicating the value proposition and marketing it; and

- A workforce and economic development integration workgroup that looks to transform policy, thinking, and practice to link generic workforce development with disability employment efforts. This group also looks to integrate both workforce development and disability employment with regional development and prosperity, including overseeing the planning and implementation of the manufacturing camps and Universal Design.

According to team members, they do not assume that they will ever be finished with systemic change, and feel it is an ongoing, evolving process. When asked to state their desired legacy from their participation in the SLII, the team cited the following:

- People with disabilities have the support they need to work, so that they have the option of earning a paycheck, instead of relying on disability payments.

- The conversation at the national level will reflect people with disabilities being recognized and valued as "talent" within the workforce, resulting in a policy environment in which disability advocates and Vocational Rehabilitation officials routinely talk with U.S. Department of Labor officials, rather than being sequestered in a special population's arena.

- The Minnesota media no longer talk about people with disabilities working but rather about workers regardless of whether they have a disability.

- The knowledge learned and work done in Minnesota will serve as models for additional populations that have barriers to employment in the competitive labor market, such as ex-offenders.

- There will be more joint interactions and collaborations among the state agencies and departments that deal with workforce, disability employment, and economic development.

- The target population will be seen as less important than the individual and economic prosperity. At the service provider level, staff will not be isolated by funding streams. There will be co-assessing of clients and less focus on what source of funding pays for whom. The system will leverage the appropriate resources to meet each individual customer's needs.

- More people with disabilities will have jobs with competitive wages.

The Actions: Accomplishments to Date

To accomplish the NTAR Leadership Center's goals for the states in the SLII, Minnesota proposed building on work done by the Minnesota Precision Manufacturing Association and the National Association of Manufacturers. This work was conducted through a collaboration the state had with Hennepin Technical College around a skill training program to create expanded avenues into skilled manufacturing positions. (The resulting curriculum was called M-Powered.)

Using this model, Minnesota's PTE project collaborated with DEED to create an innovative and successful "manufacturing camp" for youth with disabilities to gain access to the training and internship programs that precision manufacturers view as pathways into a high-demand and well-paying industry. Under the SLII, the Minnesota team proposed using the success of the pilot manufacturing camps, believing that through that effort they had gained valuable lessons about the integration of disability-specific services with workforce and economic development efforts. One lesson was that the relationships among workforce and economic development, disability specific initiatives, and businesses do not easily lead to effective services or strategies that meet all partners' needs. As noted in Minnesota's proposal to the SLII:

> Our efforts often highlight a tension between meeting the needs of individuals while collaborating to meet the needs of a group. On the one hand, we are expected to individualize and customize solutions that meet individual needs. On the other hand, we are asked to incorporate into the whole. When we fully understand the needs of a business or industry we

can customize an approach that results in sustainable successful employment for people with disabilities. We create a win-win situation when business or industry needs are fully satisfied and the job seeker enjoys sustainable employment.

With those lessons in mind, we intend to continue to adapt and expand the successful Manufacturing Camps that began in 2007 as academies for youth with disabilities...we expect [through participation in the NTAR Leadership Center SLII] to convene a workforce development universal design team comprising individuals who developed and designed the original Manufacturing Camp...and the eight sector partnerships in manufacturing, health care, and renewable energy. This 'universal design institute' will evaluate best practices and lessons learned and adapt the M-Powered curriculum model to extend it to adults with disabilities. Through this powerful collaborative process we can demonstrate how the universal design principles that were applied to the PTE supported Manufacturing Camps can be linked with other untapped workforce groups across the generic and disability specific systems. (Proposal from the State of Minnesota to the NTAR Leadership Center, March 26, 2008)[18]

Minnesota's vision of what it wanted to accomplish by its participation in the SLII relied on and built off of years of initiating, experimenting, learning, and making connections between and among multiple agencies and organizations. For Minnesota, it also required leveraging existing infrastructure that has been developed in the workforce system (the WorkForce Centers) and in the PTE initiative. The actions the state proposed to accomplish under the NTAR Leadership Center experience would dovetail nicely with current state efforts to horizontally integrate a wide variety of workforce, education, and economic development efforts. To date, the Minnesota team's efforts have included:

- **Building Off of their Shifting Gears/FastTRAC Efforts.** The team's initial conceptual, sequential approach for systemic change was to develop models, replicate models, develop policy, and improve existing programs and services. Initially, the team members looked to develop their own model, but after examining the FastTRAC program, they determined they could not develop a similar model on their own. Moving to the second step — replicating models — seemed a more promising path. The key was finding the point of entry. The team identified a good joint venture partner in FastTRAC and is incorporating what it has been doing through the SLII project in the areas of work experience and internships, among others, into FastTRAC.

- **Career Exploration.** SOAR Career Solutions is a nonprofit organization based in Duluth that specializes in helping individuals with multiple barriers to employment. The team approached SOAR Career Solutions to see if the organization was interested in partnering in a pilot project to provide hands-on career exploration to job seekers with disabilities as well as other populations. SOAR had previously received resources from Minnesota's job skills partnership grant, which funds curricula for manufacturing technology, fast-track welding, industrial sewing, and machine tool operation. All involve short-term training in a career pathway model that leads to a job. As a result of the team's efforts, a career exploration piece has been added to the model that includes on-site tours of regional businesses, which helps job seekers have a better understanding of the industries they are interested in before they start a training program.

The shop tours are followed by a training exploration field trip where students get to meet the instructors and see the training labs for all four curriculum areas. The first 10 hours are taught at the college, which provides a bridge between the incubator services and the college. At the end of training, there is a 5-hour mentoring day where employers can interview students for potential job placement. There are many opportunities for people with disabilities who are participants to make informed choices about their careers.

- **Camps to Careers.** Camp to Careers is a hands-on career exploration program targeted to high school students and recent graduates with disabilities to help them learn about jobs in in-demand fields. Although originally focused on manufacturing jobs, through SLII team efforts, the 2007 manufacturing camp pilot was expanded and has evolved into 11 camps in 2009 with both manufacturing and health care options. Program participants tour an employer's facility and engage in activities that allow them to test aspects of the job. Participants also receive access to career counseling. (Minnesota used MIG funding to develop a video on Camps to Careers, which can be accessed at: http://www.campstocareers.org/.)

- **Embedding Adult Basic Skills in Occupational Training.** Minnesota is using federal stimulus funding to require postsecondary institutions that receive these funds embed basic skills (reading, math, and language) in occupational education. DEED is also communicating to the workforce development system that it must change the way it procures training by requiring that adult basic skills training be embedded in occupational and job training whenever appropriate. Minnesota's position is that it will no longer pay for stand-alone developmental education.

- **Universal Design.** A pilot effort to incorporate Universal Design principles into the space and program planning of the state's workforce system is in the planning stage for rollout in 2010.

Lessons Learned to Date and Remaining Challenges

According to team members, Minnesota's participation in the SLII has helped to launch the state to a new level of thinking about the "inclusiveness of economic prosperity." Although the state is viewed nationally as a pioneer and leader in both workforce development and disability employment systems change efforts, state officials feel that the state's participation in the SLII has helped it to reconceptualize how to move people with disabilities to employment and how to do it in a nontraditional, creative way that builds on the strengths of the various organizations on the team and in the system. In other words, the state's participation in the SLII has given state officials the extra push it needed to actually "shift the systems." Yet, according to team members, some key challenges remain. Recognizing that the current recessionary state of the national and state economies is both a challenge and an opportunity to effectuate systems change, some hurdles identified by the team include:

> According to team members, Minnesota's participation in the SLII has helped to launch the state to a new level of thinking about the "inclusiveness of economic prosperity."

- **Creating the "new norm."** Taking on systems change efforts requires going from idea, to implementation, to evaluation, to ideally embedding a new way of practice as "the new norm." And change does not "just happen." Not all parts of the system support systems change. Even with agency co-location and joint planning, alignment around common goals at the basic level of service delivery may not be understood by the actors involved. A generation of public servants with a history of working under a particular approach is difficult to transform quickly, particularly given the federal funding source silos that generated decades of isolated service delivery. The road to change, as is being learned in Minnesota, requires structure and support at each step.

- **Federal funding silos.** Federal funding silos are a barrier for all states, including Minnesota. While funds can be "blended and braided," doing so requires significant work and trust among agencies. The silos are somewhat less of a perceived barrier in Minnesota than other states because state officials have worked hard at integrating Vocational Rehabilitation Services into the One-Stop system in the past several years.

- **Overcoming the perceptions of work held by people with disabilities.** Youth and adults with disabilities generally lack awareness of job opportunities in the growth sectors, as do many workers in the community at large. Additionally, people with disabilities are often not as prepared to be employed in high-demand, high-skill jobs as are those in the mainstream workforce. Influenced by their parents, schools, social service systems, and the media, many people with disabilities simply do not view themselves as contributors to the economy. Overcoming self-perceptions and societal perceptions is a major obstacle.

- **Overcoming misconceptions from the service delivery system.** The self-perceptions of people with disabilities aside, the service delivery system itself often does not see self-sufficient employment as a reality for people with disabilities. Therefore, mainstream workforce development initiatives do not seem applicable. For example, Vocational Rehabilitation Services staff believe they continue to struggle to be perceived as an integral piece of the workforce development system rather than as a segregated program to help a special population.

- **Employer engagement.** The team members acknowledged that committed representation from the business sector would have strengthened their initial efforts and would strengthen their work going forward. The state has learned from other regional economic development projects about the importance of having business and industry representation at the table to communicate their workforce needs; a similar strategy can benefit the NTAR Leadership Center project strategies moving forward.

Conclusion: Common Themes and Trends

Leading-edge states recognize that a skilled workforce is important to state and regional job creation and economic growth and understand that all state citizens must be included in their workforce efforts. Governors in states such as Connecticut, Maryland, and Minnesota have taken pioneering steps to develop more inclusive and integrated workforce systems to meet both the needs of workers for jobs and those of employers for skilled and diverse workers. Building on past capacity-enhancing efforts and years of experimentation and innovation, these three states have used their participation in the NTAR Leadership Center's State Leaders Innovation Institute (SLII) to bring their efforts to another, more inclusive and integrated level. During the course of this project, several key findings emerged.

For example, the profiles of these three states point to several attributes and approaches that have helped them build on and even accelerate the pace of their earlier systems change efforts. Their participation in the SLII, as noted by members of all three state teams, provided an opportunity to engage new partners, promote more inclusive policy directions, and experiment with new approaches that more deeply integrate workforce development and economic development practices with disability employment efforts. Key themes and trends include:

- **The presence or development of a unifying philosophy and strategic goal** — Inclusive Economic Prosperity for All in Minnesota and No Spare Marylander in Maryland — enables systems change teams to be focused and stay "on message."

- **Deep involvement of key state leaders** enables teams to make decisions and deliver. In all three states, the governors' signature on the letter of application to the NTAR Leadership Center served as the stamp of approval that galvanized action by state agencies. Maryland's Governor O'Malley has made workforce development a priority of his administration and his cabinet members know they must take seriously the "No Spare Marylander" refrain.

- **Regional sector/cluster-based approaches are increasingly being used as an organizing framework** for meeting business needs while also providing a pathway for underutilized populations to access careers in high-skill, high-wage industries.[19] All three states recognize and focus on regional and state economic necessities.

- **Data is a powerful tool** for policy development and accountability. Leading states know to understand and utilize data to help them reach their goals. For example, Maryland recently completed a data report that implies a large percentage of people with disabilities are not interested in looking for work. This suggests to the state team that it needs to focus first on benefits planning and incentives to work and concentrate on employer engagement only when the people with disabilities are ready to work.

- **Relationship and trust building are keys to interagency collaboration.** In all three states, many team members knew each other and had worked together on their state's extensive history of previous projects. The SLII provided an important cross-agency venue for new conversations and new partnerships toward the common economic goal expressed by the respective governors. For all three states, developing trust partnerships is particularly critical to blending and braiding resources, which entails a shared risk.

- **Progress toward disability employment efforts is cumulative and experiential.** Because the state teams were composed of representatives from a wide range of agencies, including vocational rehabilitation, workforce development, education, and others, all three states had the opportunity to learn about service delivery approaches that had been used to serve different customers. They have begun to look for ways to blend the best of what states know from disability employment (including but not limited to supported employment and Customized Employment) and universal workforce fields (e.g., sector strategies, career pathways, credentialing, internships, and apprenticeships) and apply those lessons to systems change.

- **Building on an existing success** (e.g., Connect-Ability and FastTrac) leads to systems change more rapidly than creating a new initiative. For example, Connecticut built on the Connect-Ability initiative, bringing in new partners who may have been unaware of Connect-Ability's resources. Minnesota chose to expand and adapt a Camp to Careers pilot. Building on existing successes helped these states develop momentum in their work and allowed them to look for ways to "scale up" existing models.

In all three states, there were key challenges that spanned all of their experiences to date. These included:

- **State and federal funding silos** are a common challenge across the states but blending funds at the federal level may face resistance from advocacy groups concerned their programs will get lost if they are "blended." Demonstrations in blending and braiding funds are essential in the short term; education and policy reform to change the silos are essential in the long term.

- **Attitudes** toward people with disabilities and work, including the attitudes of the disability community, employers, service delivery staff, and people with disabilities themselves, is a challenge noted by all three states. Many stakeholders are only slowly coming to believe that work, especially work in competitive employment, is a viable and reasonable option for persons with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities.

- **Engaging employers** is an ongoing challenge for the workforce development system at large, and is magnified for the disability community. The states are experimenting with a variety of approaches to overcome this obstacle. Nationally, and in states such as Minnesota, sector-based approaches are proving to be an effective strategy.

- The **complexity of benefits, services, and funding streams** that are available to support people with disabilities to gain employment is confusing to workforce professionals, as well as to people with disabilities. In particular, there is a widespread lack of understanding of how Medicaid funding fits into the employment equation.

- The **One-Stop Career Centers** are still not uniformly viewed as an effective avenue for people with disabilities to access employment and training. Considerably more work needs to be done in the area of Universal Design and staff professional development before One-Stops can truly be "one-stop" for **all** job seekers.

Having participated in the SLII, it is clear that Connecticut, Maryland, and Minnesota have benefited from the opportunity. Continued participation in the SLII can help them to fine-tune their evolving partnerships and collaborations and enhance their ability to further experiment with new, cutting-edge policy directions. As noted by all state team members, their involvement in the SLII has given them a well-supported platform to develop more inclusive and integrated state workforce policies. Having begun to implement far-reaching efforts to better align workforce development with state and regional economic prosperity efforts, their participation in the SLII has encouraged them to consider how to tie disability employment into those efforts, with the ultimate goal of helping adults with disabilities successfully access employment.

Appendix A: Concepts in Enhancing Workforce Participation for Individuals with Disabilities

States in the State Leaders Innovation Institute (SLII) were encouraged to adopt or build upon evolving approaches to improving employment for persons with disabilities that, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), have shown promise in changing traditional policies and practices and in moving individuals with disabilities to competitive employment. These practices are embedded in the five goals set forth by ODEP under the NTAR Leadership Center. Several of these practices have been embraced by the three states in the SLII, and some have been championed by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Blending and Braiding of Funds

Braiding is the accessing of resources from multiple sources, but where the sources maintain their integrity from their funding source. Braiding allows resources to be tracked more closely for the purpose of accounting to federal program administrators and avoids some of the conflicts that can arise in blended funding pools.

Blended funding has advantages because it offers significantly more flexibility for state and local agencies and reduces the work required for reporting and accountability measures. It is not as attractive to government agencies because agencies lose control and lose the ability to track funds. The use of the funds is under the direction and control of the job seeker, with assistance from a host agency.

Both blending and braiding are attractive to sustaining disability initiatives by leveraging multiple funding sources, but they require strong partnerships and mutual trust and can be difficult to establish.

Braided Funding Success Story

"Mary is a young woman who has a disability as the result of a car accident. This accident led her to drop out of college and begin receiving monthly SSI payments. She registered for services at her local One-Stop and expressed interest in a career in graphic design. In collaboration with VR and a Medicaid support coordinator, a counselor at the One-Stop formed a work group to look at options to contribute resources to an individual account to implement the Customized Employment plan that Mary developed.

The group arranged funds so that WIA paid for computer classes at the community college as part of an Individual Training Account, VR purchased a computer and adaptive equipment for home use, and Medicaid covered the cost of transportation from Mary's home to school. Mary was accountable to each funding source to use the funds for the specific, agreed-upon purposes. Each agency alone could not have met all of Mary's needs, but when they braided funds they could respond to Mary's interest in upgrading her self-taught web design skills and pursuing her future career in graphic design." (National Center on Workforce and Disability)

Customized Employment[20]

Customized Employment is one form of the growing movement of workplace flexibility or flexible work arrangements. This includes flexibility around the job tasks and flexibility of location and/or schedule as needed. ODEP implemented a five-year Customized Employment initiative in 2001 to build the capacity of workforce systems to serve all customers, including those with disabilities.

Fundamental principles of Customized Employment include:

- The employer voluntarily negotiates specific job duties or employee expectations.

- The negotiated employment relationship meets both the unique needs, strengths, and interests of the job seeker or employee and the discrete needs of the employer.

- The job seeker is the primary source of information and decides the direction in which to explore the job market.

- The job seeker controls the planning process that captures his/her preferences, interests, and connections in the community.

Even prior to planning, exploratory time is essential to uncover the job seeker's unique needs, abilities, and interests. More formal or traditional assessment may supplement this exploratory phase if necessary, but it should not be used as the primary source of information for planning.

Customized Employment results in jobs that fit the individual and therefore have the potential for advancement for job seekers who have been chronically unemployed or underemployed.

Assistive Technology

Assistive Technology devices bridge the gap between a person's physical abilities and job requirements. Federal law defines Assistive Technology devices as any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially or off the shelf, modified or customized, that increases, maintains, or improves functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Devices can be low-tech (e.g., a stapler mounted on a base with a paper guide so that an individual who uses only one hand can staple papers), high-tech (modified work equipment), or high-touch (a companion reader or interpreter). The Job Accommodation Network found that 71% of accommodations cost $500 or less, with 20% costing nothing. Most One-Stop Centers around the nation are now equipped with some level of Assistive Technology to enable individuals with disabilities to access employment and training resources.

Asset Building

Income and wealth are different concepts. It is possible to have a high income but little wealth. Income represents a short-term measure of potential resources and is vulnerable to recession and other conditions. Wealth, on the other hand, represents assets that provide a safety net that reduces vulnerability. Wealth includes pensions, stock, works of art, and homes. Intangible assets that promote wealth include: family, social, and community networks; education and skills; and a healthy environment. Individuals with disabilities tend to have fewer of the kinds of assets (home ownership, education, etc.) that provide economic security. Program eligibility requirements, health insurance policies, public education policies, transportation access, and even mortgage lending policies affect one's ability to accumulate a wide array of assets that collectively represent wealth.

It is just as important to customize a financial plan for an individual with a disability as it is to customize an employability plan. Asset building is a continuum, not a single activity. Many individuals with disabilities do not even have a relationship with a financial institution. Financial education is necessary at all levels as people move through the continuum. Asset-building strategies include connecting tax refunds to the saving process, creating Individual Development Accounts, creating Tax-Deferred Individual Homeownership Savings Accounts, and other strategies.

Universal Design

Universal Design originated out of an architectural framework. Much like a home built with Universal Design principles means its features are accessible to individuals with as wide a range of physical abilities as possible, a workforce program developed with Universal Design principles means a program is responsive to as many personal abilities and learning styles as possible. It recognizes that people think, remember, and learn differently. Some people are more visual, or more auditory, or more kinetic. North Carolina State University's Center for Universal Design defines the concept as, "The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design."

The National Center on Workforce and Disability[21] offers a collection of tools that One-Stop Career Centers can access to incorporate principles in their services. Tools include a Universal Design System Development Matrix, Universal Design System Development Tool, Universal Design Online Training Manual, and an Index of Universal Design Best Practices and Innovations from the Field.

Examples of Universal Design in a One-Stop Center[22]

- During trainings and workshops, present information verbally and in writing and incorporate graphics to illustrate information so individuals can receive information in the manner that best suits them.

- In the resource room, for all signage, use graphics and pictures combined with text. Use color to correspond to different types of information (e.g., job listings printed on different color paper from workshop notices and job listings for different job categories contained in different color binders).

- In printed materials, use bold print and larger fonts to call attention to essential information and use clear and simple fonts for all materials.

- Have clear instruction guides, with text and graphics, easily available for all equipment. This can include having electronic "post-its" on computers with instructions.

Employment First

Employment First for individuals with disabilities is different from the Work First concept under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program. In Employment First states, such as Minnesota, sheltered employment with sub-minimum wages and non-work "day activities" are no longer acceptable employment outcomes. In October 2008, ODEP convened leaders from various sectors to discuss integrated employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Participants developed a roadmap that, when implemented, will create the opportunity for people with intellectual and other significant disabilities to have the choice to work in integrated community jobs at minimum wage or above. The roadmap is based on strategies and policies implemented in several Employment First states in which employment is considered the **first** service provided to individuals with intellectual disabilities, as well as being the goal for all.

Ticket-to-Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999[23]

The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (TWWIIA or "the Act") makes it possible for millions of Americans with disabilities to no longer have to choose between taking a job and having health care. The four sections of the Act that provide health care support for people with disabilities who work are:

Medicaid Buy-In. *Section 201* of TWWIIA governs the provision of health care services to workers with severe disabilities by establishing a Medicaid state plan buy-in optional eligibility group. As of September 1, 2008, 39 states had Medicaid Buy-In Programs, covering more than 90,000 individuals.

Building a Culture of Work

Washington State has been building a culture of work since 1979 when the state issued county guidelines that clearly said work is important. Linda Rolfe, Director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities, explained the state's approach at the second SLII meeting in April 2009. After five years of disagreements, Washington State gained consensus from a majority of stakeholders in 1988 to adopt work as an organizing framework: all adults should be on a pathway to employment. In 2004, the Division determined that it could adopt and state as a policy position that it wanted people to be on a pathway to work, and implement that philosophy in July 2006.

There continues to be controversy around whether people with severe disabilities should be on such a pathway. Research shows that people with disabilities who do work have families that expect them to work and Rolfe wants to increase those expectations. She has still not convinced all legislators, even though she has data that shows the cost-effectiveness of such an approach. Daycare costs about $8,000 a year per individual and there are significant savings when people with mild to moderate impairments go to work. The real savings accrue at the federal level because of reduced Medicaid payments.

Four years ago, the Minnesota team invited a panel from Washington State to Minnesota to help them launch their own Employment First approach and empowered counties to mirror Washington's policies. As members of the team said, "It fundamentally switched where we're going from 'it's a right not to work' to 'it's a right to work'."

Extended Medicare Coverage. *Section 202* extends the period of premium-free Medicare Part A coverage and requires consumer protection for some individuals with Medigap coverage. Individuals receiving Social Security Disability Insurance who elect to work above threshold levels (substantial gainful activity) can maintain their Medicare coverage for eight-and-a-half years after they return to work.

Medicaid Infrastructure Grants. *Section 203* provides grants to states to develop state infrastructures to support working individuals with disabilities. As of 2008, over 40 states and the District of Columbia are participating in this program.

Demonstration to Maintain Independence and Employment. *Section 204* provides health care coverage to individuals with potentially disabling conditions who work. The goal of the demonstrations is to address the needs of those people who have specific physical or mental impairments that have the potential to lead to disability. This demonstration authority will allow states to assist working individuals by providing the necessary benefits and services required for people to manage the progression of their conditions and remain employed. The demonstration projects will be used to evaluate the impact of the provision of Medicaid benefits and services as related to extended productivity and increased quality of life.

The Act also helps individuals to obtain services and jobs through a new universe of organizations called Employment Networks. The Ticket-to-Work Program is voluntary. Social Security Administration beneficiaries are not mandated to participate and in most cases, Employment Networks can choose which services they want to provide, where, and to whom. Beneficiaries receiving Tickets can contact one or more Employment Networks to discuss services and once an agreement between the beneficiary and the Employment Networks is reached, the two work together to develop a work plan to assist the beneficiary in reaching his/her employment goal.

Appendix B: State SLII Team Members

Connecticut

Joyce Barcley, The Workplace, Inc. (Co-Team Leader)

Chris Tymniak, Governor's Southwest Office (Co-Team Leader)

Kim Andy, Office of Workforce Competitiveness

Terry Brennan, Department of Labor

Anne Carr, Career Resources, Inc.

Francine Dew, Department of Administrative Services

Pat Downs, Department of Economic and Community Development (retired)

Victor Fuda, Department of Labor

Lindy Lee Gold, Department of Community Development

Mary Ann Hanley, Office of Workforce Competitiveness

John Houchin, Department of Developmental Services

Thomas Kirk, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (retired)

Tony LaCava, Disability Resource Center

Theresa Lantz, Department of Corrections (retired)

Arlene Lugo, Bureau of Rehabilitative Services/Connect-Ability/Tech Act

Kathy Marchione, Bureau of Rehabilitative Services

Kathy Marioni, Department of Labor

Melissa Marshall, Connecticut Business Leadership Network

Patricia Mayfield, Department of Labor

Joan McDonald, Department of Economic and Community Development

Sam McKnight, Governor's Commission for the Employment of People with Disabilities

Susan Monteleone, Board of Education and Services for the Blind

Brenda Moore, Bureau of Rehabilitative Services (retired)

Pan Nabors, Capital Workforce Partners (WIB)

Larry Nickloff, Department of Correction

Peter O'Meara, Department of Social Services

Adrienne Parkmond, The WorkPlace, Inc.

Amy Porter, Bureau of Rehabilitative Services

Judy Resnick, CBIA

Rosanne Ryba, Department of Correction

Virginia Sampietro, Eastern Connecticut WIB

Brian Sigman, Board of Education and Services for the Blind

Paul Susen, Connecticut Community Colleges

Sharon Wall, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

Scott Wilderman, Career Resources, Inc.

Robin Wood, Department of Developmental Services

Maryland

The Maryland team, formerly co-chaired by **Thomas Perez**, Secretary, Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation, is now being co-chaired by **Eric Seleznow**, Executive Director of the Governor's Workforce Investment Board and **Catherine Raggio**, Secretary, Department of Disabilities.

Team members as of November 1, 2009 include:

Caroline Varney Alvarado, Department of Housing and Community Development

Robert Burns, Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Rehabilitation Services

Asuntha Chiang-Smith, Base Realignment and Closure Subcabinet

Gerald Cichy, Department of Transportation, Maryland Transit Administration

Dr. Charlene Dukes, Prince George's County Community College

Bruce England, Susquehanna Workforce region (invited)

Andy Moser, Assistant Secretary for Workforce Development (invited)

Anne Rea, Adult Services, Way Station, Inc.

Annabelle Sher, Department of Business and Economic Development

Kurt Sommers, Office of Legislative Affairs, Department of Housing and Community Development

Bob Vetere, Human Resources, Northrup Grumman

Minnesota

Kathy Sweeney, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Workforce Development Division (Team Leader)

Jeff Bangsberg, Minnesota's State Rehabilitation Council

Alex Bartolic, Minnesota Department of Human Services, Disability Services Division

Debra Bultnick, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Workforce Development Division-Business Services Unit (Monticello WorkForce Center)

Steven Ditschler, ProAct, Inc., Chair, Minnesota's State Rehabilitation Council

John Fisher, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Workforce Development Division-Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Sandy Froiland, Anoka County WorkForce Center (Blaine, MN)

Rod Haworth, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Workforce Development Division-Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Minnesota's Pathways to Employment Project

Alyssa Klein, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Workforce Development Division-Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Minnesota's Pathways to Employment Project

Diane Knutson, Economic Development Program Specialist, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Business Development Division

Stephen Larson, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Workforce Development Division, Northwest Minnesota

Don Lavin, RISE, Inc.

Paul A. Moe, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

MaryAlice Mowry, Minnesota Department of Human Services, Pathways to Employment

Kim Peck, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Workforce Development Division

Jeanette D. Rydberg, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

Ann Sessoms, Minnesota Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services

End Notes

1. Herbert, S. *Changing Systems is Like Moving a Mountain: And Other Insights from Successful Workforce Leaders* (Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010)

2. U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. SGA 07-05, National Technical Assistance and Research Center to Promote Leadership for Employment and Economic Independence for Adults with Disabilities: Solicitation for Cooperative Agreement. Federal Register/ Vol. 72, No 139/Friday, July 20, 2007.

3. The NTAR Leadership Center originally operated through a consortium of partners including the American Public Human Services Association, Center for Workers with Disabilities; the National Leadership Consortium on Developmental Disabilities at the University of Delaware; the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey; the Community Solutions Groups LLC; and the Program for Disability Research at the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

4. U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. SGA 07-05.

5. The concepts in the five strategic goals as well as other trends in moving persons with disabilities into self-sustaining employment are described in Appendix A.

6. Solicitation Guidelines: State Leaders Innovation Institute to Expand Employment for Adults with Disabilities, January 28, 2008.

7. The State Peer Leaders Network (SPLN) was established to facilitate information exchange, continuous learning, and the sharing of promising practices and strategies for a group of states interested in putting these practices to work. The NTAR Leadership Center provides technical assistance upon request in the five strategic goal areas, topical teleconferences, and webinars. The NTAR Leadership Center also established a Web site that assists the State Leaders Innovation Institute and SPLN states as a vehicle for knowledge exchange and information sharing, and provides state officials with information, research, and learning tools needed to design policies and partnerships that strengthen state and local leadership efforts to improve the employment and economic self-sufficiency of people with disabilities.

8. Connecticut State Leaders Innovation Institute proposal to the NTAR Leadership Center, March 26, 2008 (unpublished).

9. http://www.connect-ability.com/about.php

10. Maryland State Leaders Innovation Institute proposal to the NTAR Leadership Center, March 27, 2008 (unpublished).

11. Maryland Department of Disabilities Web site, retrieved August 9, 2010 from: http://www. mdod.maryland.gov/MTAP.aspx?id=180.

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13. The 2008 Progress report may be found at http://brac.maryland.gov/ documents/2008bracReport.pdf. A progress matrix is located at http://brac.maryland.gov/ documents/2008bracReportMatrix.pdf.

14. Interview notes.

15. U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.

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17. Minnesota Department of Human Services Web site, Medical Assistance for Employed Persons with Disabilities, retrieved August 9, 2010 from: http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/ idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&d DocName=id_004088#.

18. Ibid.

19. For more information on sector strategies, see the Workforce Strategies Initiative of the the Aspen Institute at http://www.aspenwsi.org/.

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22. Hoff, D., Varney, E., Enein-Donovan, L., Thomas, C., and Fesko, S. *Access for All Customers: Universal Strategies for One-Stops* (Boston: Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston, 2009).

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Acknowledgements

About the NTAR Leadership Center

Founded in 2007 under a grant/contract with the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor, the NTAR Leadership Center's mission is to build capacity and leadership at the federal, state, and local levels to enable change across workforce development and disability-specific systems that will increase employment and economic self-sufficiency for adults with disabilities.

About ODEP

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) provides national leadership on disability employment policy by developing and influencing the use of evidence-based disability employment policies and practices, building collaborative partnerships, and delivering authoritative and credible data on employment of people with disabilities.